MRS. CURGENVEN OF CURGENVEN

BY

S. BARING GOULD

MRS CURGENVEN

OF CURGENVEN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ARMINELL
URITH
IN THE ROAR OF THE SEA
CHEAP JACK ZITA
MARGERY OF QUETHER
THE QUEEN OF LOVE
JACQUETTA
KITTY ALONE
NOÉMI
THE BROOM-SQUIRE
DARTMOOR IDYLLS
THE PENNYCOMEQUICKS
GUAVAS THE TINNER
BLADYS
DOMITIA
PABO THE PRIEST
WINIFRED
THE FROBISHERS
ROYAL GEORGIE
MISS QUILLET
CHRIS OF ALL SORTS
IN DEWISLAND
LITTLE TU'PENNY

MRS CURGENVEN
OF CURGENVEN

BY

S. BARING-GOULD

FIFTH AND CHEAPER EDITION

METHUEN & CO.
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First Published . . . April 1893
Second Edition . . . July 1893
Third Edition . . . November 1893
Fourth Edition . . . December 1896
Fifth and Cheaper Edition . March 1905

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MRS. CURGENVEN

CHAPTER I.

ON THE TERRACE.

'EXCUSE me—*I* am Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.

'I beg your pardon, madam, I did not say—*of* Curgenven.'

'There is but one Mrs. Curgenven, whether of Curgenven or of anywhere else. Perhaps you meant the late Mrs. Percival?'

'I did mean the late Mrs. Percival Curgenven. I make a thousand apologies.'

'There can be but one Mrs. Curgenven. If my husband had had nine brothers, and all had married, there would have been a Mrs. Jack, and a Mrs. Tom, and a Mrs. Will, and so and so; but I alone would have been Mrs. Curgenven. You understand. I do not care about this myself, other people are more particular. I do not make a point of this, others do; that is why I have spoken, to prevent your falling into the mistake again, which in certain quarters might give deadly offence. If we are anything at all in this world, let us be exact.'

The lady who thus put to rights the person who had addressed her, was tall, stately, good-looking. The person addressed was small, undignified, ugly—a man with a face like a pug dog. Who she was the reader has been informed by her own lips. He was Mr. Physic, solicitor, agent for the Curgenven estate as well as for two or three other properties in the neighbourhood.

It was certainly strange that Mr. Physic should have been for many years associated on certain terms of intimacy with the leading families around, and yet have never learned that one canon of social intitulation which Mrs. Curgenven now laid down for him with emphasis in a manner he was not likely to forget. But it is the case that there are persons who perceive nothing, and who must be taught with a hammer.

The estates of the gentry in the neighbourhood were not large, and one agent was able to manage three or four. This was a saving to the pockets of the landowners of a hundred or a hundred and fifty pounds each. It was true they grumbled. Each thought his affairs were not attended to with sufficient promptitude, and talked of either managing them himself or putting them into other hands, but no one did it. Each landowner knew his own incompetence, and Mr. Physic knew very well that there was no one in the district to compete with him, and was not rendered uneasy at this restlessness. He was a valuable man, each squire admitted that. He had qualified as a solicitor, and had the law of landlord and tenant at his fingers' ends. He drew the leases himself, as he was competent to do so. He had an intimate acquaintance with the prices in the building trade, and could draw up a specification for a tender. He was dexterous with compasses, and could make plans, and so do away with the necessity for calling in an architect. Yet he was not liked. He was suspected of sharp practice; every man who employed him believed that he was 'done' by him, yet thought it worth his while to submit rather than run the risk of getting into worse hands.

The school-children were being given a treat of tea and sports in the grounds of Curgenven, as Mrs. Curgenven was the general manageress of the Sunday school, and supervised the needlework in the National school.

Tables formed of boards laid on trestles stood on the terrace, covered with white cloths, and studded with plates piled up with cake, bread-and-jam, muffins, and adorned with glass celery-holders full of flowers. The children were eating as hard as they could, producing with their mouths a sound like the crumpling of newspapers. The servants of Curgenven were running about, assisted by the pupil teachers, ministering to the wants of the children.

'Stop, Phœbe!' exclaimed Mrs. Curgenven. 'That child has already drunk six cups. She'll be ill if she takes a seventh.' Then she returned to Mr. Physic.

'Yes—what about the late Mrs. Percival?'

'Nothing more than this, ma'am, that it is a pity for young

Master Justin that his mother is not alive. There is really no one to control him.'

'That depends on what sort of person she was. I never knew her. If a man marries out of the country, heaven alone knows what he may pick up. That will do, Lambert. There is no necessity for wasting coals.' The last words were addressed to her husband, Captain Curgenven, who was engaged on the boiler that supplied hot water for the teapots, and which was planted at a corner of the terrace near a tap whence water could be drawn.

'Dear, dear! what a mess there will be to-morrow! Really, Lambert, you need not have strewn the coals about in this fashion. One would think you were made of money to be so extravagant, and to have an army of gardeners to clear up the litter after you. Look here! Do not you see the children have had enough? There is little Bessy Collop has had six cups of tea already, and Phœbe, who never thinks—who has no more brains than a peacock—was giving her a seventh when I interfered. Let the fire out. Don't boil water when water is no longer wanted. And such lumps of coals too!'

'My dear, I suppose the maids want hot water to wash up with.'

'But you don't suppose that they'll wash up on the terrace, do you? Let them attempt it. Where's papa?'

'I saw him talking to Dalby, the school-master, just now.'

The clear, searching eyes of Mrs. Curgenven ranged the terrace.

'I see him,' she said. 'Now mind—no more coals,' then off she went to her father, the rector of the parish, the Rev. James Pamphlet, a tall, elderly man with white whiskers very full, and standing out as if each hair were electrified. He wore the most starched of collars and the most glossy of coats. On his face sat a perpetual smile, and he turned his head from side to side and nodded urbanely to every pupil teacher and parishioner whose eye he encountered, and he continued nodding after each greeting as though his head were hung on a wire, and so nicely balanced, that it did not recover its equipoise at once.

'Papa, the children have nearly finished. Lambert is going to show them his mechanical contrivances; he will require a few minutes for winding them up. So, when they have done tea, let the children have a short service to keep them occupied.'

'Certainly, Jane.'

'Moreover, if they are withdrawn and in church, it will allow the maids to clear away the tea-things.'

'Exactly—I will give them an address.'

'Papa!—not too long. Is it really necessary that there should be one? A short service, some hymns, and all that sort of thing, just sufficient to keep them out of the way when they are not wanted.'

'I think it advisable—imperative that I should give an address. Dalby is local agent for one of the county papers, and I should not like a notice of this treat to appear without some mention of me and my address.'

'Very well, papa, don't make it too long. I suppose the children may sing something as they march to church.'

'Don't ask me. If you wish it, do it, but nothing doctrinal, you understand. Tell Dalby to set them something to sing that has sentiment, not meaning in it. I don't wish to appear as a party man, and there is no saying, if they sang something with doctrine of any sort in it, it might be taken up and made a party matter.'

'Why,' suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Curgenven, 'dear me! That surely is Esther Morideg! Mr. Dalby—here! This instant. How comes this about? Here is Esther Morideg among the scholars. She has not made her proper number of attendances, of that I am very sure.'

Mrs. Curgenven had singled out a dark-eyed, red-haired girl at the table.

'Stand up, Esther. What audacity to put in an appearance here! Mr. Dalby, can you inforn me how many attendances this girl has made? She is most irregular. Has not got into the second standard yet—and at her age! Disgraceful, Mr. Dalby. Has she been reported to the relieving officer?'

'Yes, ma'am, the list of attendances is given every month.'

'And he has done nothing?'

'No, ma'am. At least, he lays it before the School Attendance Committee at Liskeard.'

'And that, of course, does nothing?'

'Nothing at all, ma'am.'

'Of course not, they never do. But that is no reason why I should not. There is no excuse for Esther's non-attendance, is there?'

'Not that I am aware of.'

'Then, Esther, tie up your mug in your kerchief and be off with you home. Captain Curgenven and myself did not invite those children who are irregular, disorderly, and no credit to the school. We are encouraging non-attendance, idle ways, if we pass this over. Go! You shall not see what Captain Curgenven is about to show to the other children. You shall not run races, nor play games, nor scramble for nuts and lollipops. Go, and then, perhaps, another year you will learn to be more regular in your attendance.'

The girl began to cry.

Then a hand was put into that of Mrs. Curgenven. It was that of her own daughter Alice, a fair, sweet girl of sixteen.

'Dear mamma, do let Esther stay. She has had her tea. I am sure she will be more regular in future.'

'No!' said the lady. 'Discipline must be maintained. What is the good of our having schools, and paying to maintain them, if the children are not sent to them?'

'If you love me, mamma!'

'I love you very well, Alice, but I have my duties to perform. No—it is of no use your running off to get papa to intercede. In these matters I am inflexible.' The girl had run to her father, and was pleading with him. He was engaged still on the boiler, raking out the fire, and was without his coat. Captain Curgenven never could be brought to a sense of what was proper to his position. His wife's colour mounted when she perceived that he was in his shirt-sleeves.

'Really, Lambert, this is too provoking. No, Lambert, it is not of the slightest use your putting in a plea for Esther Morideg. It seems to me as if the whole world would go into a dishevelled, slouching, happy-go-lucky condition but for me and the like of me. Some one must make a stand for order and decency. Do, for pity's sake, put on your coat, and say not a word for Esther. Goodness gracious me! What has that fellow Dalby set the children to sing? Alice—run and stop it. This will never do. They are marching to church with "I would I were in monkey-land, and swinging by my tail." Papa will be annoyed. This is worse than a doctrinal hymn. Run, Alice—stop it before the first children get into the porch swinging by their tails. One must do everything oneself, no one is to be trusted. I did think the school-master had more sense. It will upset papa seriously for fear what people might say, and lest it should get into the papers. Don't laugh, Lambert—it is no laughing matter. There—do leave the boiler alone. You go and get your mechanism wound up and set agoing. And mind, Lambert, I won't have you cutting silly jokes with the children, and making yourself ridiculous. Please not to forget that you are Curgenven of Curgenven, and don't leave it to me alone to maintain the dignity of the family and of the name.'

As Mrs. Curgenven turned to direct her energies on another point, she encountered a wild-looking woman, with tanned face, a scarlet kerchief about her throat, and an apron covering her black gown.

'Lady!' said this woman, 'have you sent my Esther away?'

'Oh! Mrs. Morideg, you here! Now I can tell you my mind plainly. Yes, I have dismissed your grand-daughter. She came here under false pretences. She was here as a scholar, and she is an ignoramus. She is not an attendant at school, but a stay-away. What do you expect will become of the girl in this world or the next, unless she goes through her standards?'

'I could not always spare her, ma'am.'

'That is a mere excuse. Where there is a will there is a way. You do not value education. You know very well that I offered to pay her school pence if you would send her regularly. As the School Attendance Committee won't do its duty, I must. And I tell you, there is no treat for those who are not regular scholars.'

'Please, lady, pass it over this once. Esther be a-crying, and her has been shamed afore all the school.'

'I cannot pass it over. Let this be a salutary lesson.'

'But, lady, look round. How grand and beautiful it all is in the park and gardens. You see that every day.'

'I have been through my standards.'

'And Esther never sees aught but the moors.'

'She has not yet got into the second standard. She is not qualified to see anything else.'

'Instead of this day being to her one of happiness, it's one of sorrow; and her's looked forward to it half the year. Pray, sweet lady darling, let Esther come back.'

'When I have said a word I do not withdraw it. I am sorry—but some one must make a stand. If the relieving officer won't look up the non-attendances, and the Attendance Committee won't prosecute, I *must* do my duty.'

Mrs. Curgenven was not an unkind woman, but she was a woman who had a strong sense of her obligations. Brought up by a feeble father, married to a volatile husband, she had come to regard herself as the sole prop that sustained the moral, religious, and social order in the place. When she had made up her mind that a certain course of action was right, she did it, regardless of dissuasion and comment.

As she looked at the woman before her, she was struck with the peculiarity of her eyes, which were as though double-irised. These strange eyes were now fixed on her, and their peculiarity sent unwittingly a thrill through her. She could understand how that Thomasine Morideg was said to have the evil eye, and be able to 'overlook,' that is to blight, men and beasts by the glance of these strange eyes.

The woman, looking at her, put her hands behind her back and untied her apron, held it before her, and shook it.

'I had good thoughts of you, lady,' she said, 'and kindly will, and I shake them out as I shake the dust from my apron.'

Then she turned her apron and bound it about her waist again, and said—

'And—lady—as I turn this apron so do I turn your fortune as was up to-day into down to-morrow. All your good fortune be gone from you and be changed into evil.'

She stepped aside and walked away, before Mrs. Curgenven had recovered from her surprise. In her place stood a stranger.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE FACE.

Mrs. Curgenven had not observed this person before, owing to the servants passing and repassing, the volunteers flying about and running against each other in their efforts to make themselves useful in clearing the tables. These volunteers were farmers' daughters and wives, glad to oblige the wife of their squire. The stranger was a dark-haired, sallow woman, of about her own age, near thirty-five, with large, intelligent, expressive eyes, and with the lower portion of her face beautifully formed. Mrs. Curgenven could not recollect having ever seen her before, and the face was not one which, when once seen, was likely to be forgotten.

The first question the squiress put to herself referred to the position in life occupied by this stranger, that she might regulate her conduct towards her accordingly. Social standing was all-in-all to Mrs. Curgenven. She addressed those of her own rank in one fashion, those of a lower position in another fashion, and with *nuances* in her mode of address nicely adjusted to the several gradations on the social scale of those to whom she spoke.

Was this person before her a lady, a *real* lady, or not? The stranger did not look in the least like a farmer's wife. The delicate texture of the skin, the ivory complexion, were not such as were found among those who face all weathers on market days. The delicate lips, the fine chin, spoke of culture. Mrs. Curgenven studied the dress of the stranger. It was sad in colour, simple, well-made, but not fashionable. It was distinctly the dress of a lady, and as distinctly that of a poor lady. The keenly critical eye of Mrs. Curgenven detected signs of wearing out.

But how was it possible that a lady should thus intrude uninvited on private grounds?

Mrs. Curgenven assumed an air of stiffness, threw a keep-your-distance look into her eyes, and said, 'May I ask whom I have the pleasure——'

'Mrs. Curgenven.'

The squiress made a slight bow.

'I *am* Mrs. Curgenven.'

'You misunderstand me.' The strange lady looked round, and—possibly without premeditation—drew off her left glove. The lady of Curgenven House saw a delicate hand, and on the third finger was the golden wedding-hoop.

No one was near; no one could hear what was said. Those who were on the terrace were engaged with mugs and teapots, with empty cake-trays, and half-eaten dishes of bread-and-butter.

'You misunderstand me,' repeated the stranger, '*I* am Mrs. Curgenven.'

'Mrs.—er—er—what Curgenven? I beg your pardon, Mrs. er—er——'

'Mrs. Curgenven,' answered the strange lady. 'My husband is Lambert Curgenven.'

The blood rushed into the face of the squiress. She drew back a step, looked at the speaker from head to foot.

'This insolence——'

'Excuse me, it is the truth. Call Lambert.'

To hear her husband, the Squire of Curgenven, a Deputy-Lieutenant, a Justice of the Peace, called by his Christian name by one not authorized by tie of blood to do so, completely upset Mrs. Curgenven's judgment. She beckoned to Mr. Physic, whom she saw at some distance, to come to her aid. There boiled up in her mind a feeling of wrath against her husband. This was what came of taking off his coat before folk! of poking and raking coals under a boiler! No wonder that——

'Stay,' said the strange lady. 'Do not let us have a scene. I did not come prepared for that; I do not desire it. I had no intention of doing more than show myself, that Lambert might be prepared to act according to what is just and right.'

'How dare you speak of Captain Curgenven in this manner?' exclaimed the squiress, usually a cool and collected person, but now completely thrown off her balance by the audacity of the personage before her.

'I have the best possible right—I am his wife.'

Mrs. Curgenven beckoned vehemently, and Physic almost ran to her side.

'Mr. Physic, call the constable; there is here a person—either a lunatic or sent to insult me—that must be removed at once.' She turned to the stranger, 'Will you go? or shall I call in the police?'

'I will not now leave till Captain Curgenven has been summoned.'

Mr. Physic looked from one speaker to the other, he did not in the least comprehend what was the situation.

'It would have been better,' said the stranger, 'that this matter were settled quietly. It was wrong in me, perhaps, to come here on such an occasion, but I thought to take advantage of the crowd and see Curgenven, about which I had heard, and to have the chance of meeting my husband, that he might be aware I was alive and prepared to assert my rights.'

An expression of astonishment and perplexity passed over Mr. Physic's face, he struck his hands together audibly.

'Madam!' said he, 'here come all the children and school teachers back from church. Good gracious! this is not a matter for such a moment.'

'I will have this insolent person removed. Call the constable, Tregaskis, I saw him somewhere on the terrace. On my own grounds to receive such an outrage! It is too monstrous!'

'I think,' said Physic, 'I really think, ma'am, we'd better not have the police here. I have no doubt this—this—lady will see the advisability of retiring.'

'I will go,' said the stranger, 'and make no disturbance at all. It is not my wish to do so. Your position, madam, is a painful one, and I would spare you confusion as much as possible, but I insist on being brought face to face with Captain Curgenven. You shall judge for yourself.'

Mrs. Curgenven interrupted her. 'It is unseemly; it is an impertinence. You shall not be brought face to face with the captain. I absolutely forbid it. If you do not go at once, of your own accord, I will have you removed by force.'

'I am not going till I have seen him or he has seen me. Permit me to seat myself on that garden bench. I will speak to no one. I will remain perfectly quiet, and then bring the captain this way—where he can confront me.'

'Call the constable,' said the squiress, imperiously.

'Allow me to entreat you,' urged Mr. Physic. 'May I have a word in private?'

'Certainly.' Mrs. Curgenven stepped on one side, and the agent attended her. She had reared her head and stiffened her back. Her colour was heightened. She was unaccustomed to be browbeaten and insulted—she, the squiress, the rector's daughter! And this insult was so gross, so unutterably repulsive.

'If you will suffer me to advise, ma'am,' said the agent. 'The first thing to be now considered is how to avoid a scandal.'

'The woman is mad. She has broken out of an asylum.'

'Possibly. But if what she says be heard, the tongues of the whole neighbourhood will be set wagging.'

'What do I care? The woman is a maniac. Who gives the slightest credence to the ravings of a lunatic?'

'It will save both yourself and Captain Curgenven a great deal of annoyance if you humour her craze—supposing it to be a craze——'

'It is a craze. I am surprised, Mr. Physic, that you should allow there is any doubt in the matter.'

'There is no saying, ma'am. Excuse my speaking what may be very unpleasant, but something may have occurred in the past for which no doubt Captain Curgenven is much grieved, and which may—I only say may—have caused this craze on the part of the female who is now occasioning unpleasantness. What we must endeavour to do is to get her away without any disturbance, and inquire into the matter afterwards.'

'But conceive!' exclaimed the incensed lady. 'If what she asserts were true, what would *I* be? It is preposterous. She is mad. She is raving.'

'And a maniac is best managed by humouring. Let her seat herself as she proposes. Let Captain Curgenven be brought near, where she can see him and he can see her.'

'Then there will be a scene. She will do the wildest, most outrageous acts.'

'Trust me. I will have the police brought near. If she does, she shall be removed at once, but I do not think it. I will, with your permission, soothe her, and persuade her to go.'

'But who is she? What is she?'

'I never saw her in my life before.'

'And you know nothing about her? She can't have sprung out of the fountain, or dropped out of a rook's nest.'

'I have a suspicion.'

'What?' asked Mrs. Curgenven, turning sharply on the agent.

He hesitated, regretted what he had said, and endeavoured to retreat from it. 'No—it is not right to say that. I assure you, ma'am, I have never seen her before.'

'And you know nothing about her?'

'Nothing.'

'Very well, I yield.'

Mrs. Curgenven and the agent turned to where they had quitted the stranger, and found that she had withdrawn and had quietly seated herself on the bench she had previously indicated. She was drawing on again her left glove.

A buzz of voices was approaching, above it rang out an occasional word of command in a hard masculine voice. The children were marching two and two from church to the terrace, and, as the singing had been put a stop to, were talking together in procession.

'Monkey-land' had been too much for the rector. He was afraid lest it should get into the papers. Accordingly in church he had scribbled on a fly-leaf of his hymnal, 'No singing on leaving church, please,' and had torn it out and passed the order to the school-master.

The strange lady was seated on the terrace in a garden-chair. The twilight from the north lighted her pearly-white face. The brows were contracted and the lips tightly drawn together. She looked dreamily at the landscape.

The park-like grounds, of the most velvety grass-clothed sweeps, were studded with noble oaks, beech, and Scotch pines. The woods became dense about the base of the moors that soared up into the pure sky, crested with granite, and the foliage rolled part way up their sides. A stream, falling in foam over a granite lip, passed in a series of cascades through the woods, and spread below the lawn into a lake tenanted by wild-fowl.

But the stranger did not look at the distant landscape, her eyes observed the house, the terrace, the gardens and shrubberies. The house was large, a Queen Anne mansion of grey stone with granite dressings, and tall windows telling of stately rooms within.

Presently her ear caught a voice—a cheery voice shouting. 'Now then, children, there are prizes for all those who have been good, and there are also some wonderful contrivances of mine I am going to show you. As to the prizes, you shall each choose what suits you best, according to the number of good-conduct and attendance marks you have, and by your standards. Come, follow me!'

Her delicate lips quivered as with pain, as she heard the voice, then she turned and looked at the speaker. It was Captain Curgenven, in a short coat, with his cap off, held in his hand, waving it to the scholars who were overflowing the terrace, along with the pupil teachers, district visitors, the school-master, the Scripture reader, and the mission woman.

'Now then, come along!' shouted the captain, and he turned and faced the strange lady who had risen from her seat.

His eyes rested upon her for a moment without inquiry in them. There were a twinkle of fun and a glow of good-humour in his eyes. But slowly the spark went out, and the glow disappeared. The whole expression of his face changed. His colour faded, and a vague look of fear stole over his features.

For full a minute the captain stood speechless, his lips parted, looking blankly at the strange woman, the children, the monitresses, the school-master, the Scripture reader, the mission woman, and Mrs. Curgenven standing by. Then slowly—drawing a long breath—he gasped: 'Good Lord! Resa!'

'Lambert!'

The captain raised a trembling hand to his brow, that which held his cap, and retained it there. 'Resa! what is to be done? I thought—I thought you were dead.'

Then he slowly turned and staggered away, and the school-children, the monitresses, the sewing-mistress, the parochial helpers, the mission woman who worked on one line, and the Scripture reader who worked across it, the agent, the school-master—all trooped after him to see what was to be seen and to get what was to be given.

CHAPTER III.

A RACE.

CAPTAIN CURGENVEN'S step was usually firm, and he walked with a swing, as though pacing the quarter-deck with a sense of authority. But now he walked with uncertainty, as doubtful in which direction to go; there was no spring in his step, but limpness in the knees. He still held the cap in one hand, he forgot to put it on his head. His steps turned in the direction of the bungalow.

The bungalow was a structure the captain had erected at a little distance from the house, and was of wood. It contained a billiard- and a smoking-room, also a workshop. Here the captain was wont to spend much of his time. He had a mechanical talent, and delighted in making little mills turned by water, and scarecrows set in motion by wind, and jacks to be made active by the rush of smoke up a chimney, and absurd toys for the tea-table to be set in movement by the steam from the kettle.

All these fruits of the ingenuity of Captain Curgenven were useless, though serving to amuse for a few minutes. Mrs. Curgenven had taken on her at first to remonstrate with her husband for spending his time and thought upon trifles, but had finally submitted, in deference to her father's opinion, who had represented to her that 'if he did anything of practical utility he would run counter to the interests, the habits, or the prejudices of some one or other, and that would give rise to animadversion. Whereas now,' said the Reverend James Pamphlet, 'no one can say anything against what he invents and executes, which is a great—nay, it is everything.'

Captain Curgenven reeled along the path to the bungalow with the swarm of children, teachers, and parochial odds and ends after him, laughing, talking, in flutter of expectation and jubilant hope. That is to say, the children who were to receive prizes were laughing and hopeful; the Scripture reader and the mission woman maintained a professional solemnity, the first because it was sinful, the second because it was indecorous to laugh; and the school-master remained grave, lest any tokens of levity should sap the foundations of his authority by letting the school-children see that he was subject to like weaknesses as themselves.

Mrs. Curgenven and Mr. Physic followed, the former perplexed—not knowing what to make of her husband's change of manner and of colour, more than half disposed to believe that he was performing antics, indulging in low buffoonery, and hugging herself with the resolution that for this as well as the waste of coals, and the working in shirt-sleeves, she must take him to task in a curtain lecture.

Mr. Physic followed, interested to see how this strange incident would end.

Mrs. Curgenven was far removed from attributing importance to the appearance and assertion of the strange lady. She concluded in her mind that this individual was either insane, and therefore to be pitied, or was an impostor seeking to extort money, and was therefore to be treated with severity.

There are certain self-evident verities on which all sciences are built up. The geometrician assumes that things that are equal to the same thing are equal also to one another, and the metaphysician that the *ego*, the I, myself, is a sentient unit.

So did Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven assume as an unassailable and self-evident axiom that she was Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven. The corollary to which was, that in the entire universe there could by no possibility be—could not be imagined in the region of fancy to be—another Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.

Presently the captain became aware that many feet were tramping the gravel after him, and he turned and stood, with arms stiffly extended, cap in hand, looking at those who followed.

The tail had grown.

The sidesmen and churchwardens had joined it. The leaders of the Band of Hope and of the Church of England Temperance Society, the organist of the church, the promotress of mothers' meetings, had fallen in. The police-constable, Mr. Tregaskis, seeing that the guests, old and young, were drifting in one direction, also joined to form a link in the chain, a joint in the tail. The sexton, the clerk, the choir, every member in the elaborately articulated and perfectly organized parochial system—organized for the sake of organization, with no other object than organization—was in the coil that wound after the captain, and was suddenly arrested by his turning and facing it.

In the distance appeared the rector, passing his fingers through his white whiskers, stalking down the churchyard path.

Several of the servant-maids of the hall in their white caps and aprons ran from the kitchen. They had removed the tea-things and wished to see the children receive their prizes.

James, the footman, also followed in plush and white stockings, walking with as much gravity and dignity as the rector.

Almost the sole person who had not been caught by the current and drawn after Captain Curgenven to the bungalow was the strange lady. She had not resumed her seat on the garden bench, but was walking down the drive to the lodge gates, turning her back on the festive scene.

Outside the gates were Thomasine Morideg and Esther.

'What,' said the old woman, 'be you turned away? Has her said, "You shan't come in. Get you gone, you're none fit to be wi' me"? Be easy i' mind. I've turned her luck again' her.'

The captain stood facing the troop of children, women, and men that had been following him. He looked vacantly from one to another, as though he did not understand the signification of the rout at his heels. He saw his wife and Physic, and his lips moved. He was trying to articulate something, but could produce no sound. He gesticulated with his cap. Then he perceived the police-constable, and at once turned and ran towards the bungalow.

The boys of the school uttered a whoop! and set off at a scamper, followed by the girls at a trot, and the pupil teachers, school-master, Scripture reader, and mission woman at an amble. A budget of tracts escaped the pocket of the Scripture reader, and fluttered about and then fell on the gravel, where they were trampled by the feet of the children, the churchwardens, and the district visitors, deaf to their appeals, 'Where are you going?' 'Are you converted?' 'How are your poor souls?'

The black veil of the mission woman unfurled and streamed behind her as she careered along, like the pennon of a buccaneer that gave no quarter.

Mrs. Curgenven, seeing the tracts on the gravel, exclaimed, 'How can the captain so forget himself as to lead them a paper-chase?'

Captain Curgenven reached the bungalow, dashed inside, shut and locked the door in the face of his pursuers. At once the swarm accumulated about the entrance. The children whispered, and laughed, and contended with one another which came first in order for choosing the prizes.

One of the district visitors, whose duty it was in the highly organized parish to see after missionary contributions, had an S.P.G. mission-box in one pocket and a C.M.S. box in the other, each with coppers in it, and as she ran with the children she rattled, but now that the race was at an end the rattle ceased.

'Our squire be an uncommon sort of a gent,' said one of the churchwardens; 'don't y' think so, Jukes?'

'Well,' answered the other, 'I should say, Boales, as he made hisself too common.'

'It's them nautical goings-on,' said Boales. 'Sailors haven't no proper respect for themselves as has other folk.'

'You see he waren't born to it,' said Jukes.

'That's just about it,' agreed Boales.

The rector, walking in stately solemnity from the church, as though unable to rouse himself from the ecstatic trance produced by his own eloquence in his address to the children, raised his white eyebrows, and as he put his hand to the wicket-gate from the church-path into the Curgenven grounds, said, 'Tish! tish! there is my son-in-law at his nonsense again. I wish he could be taught to wear the wisdom-cap. He is a boy in spirits, and he forgets that he has a position, as having married my daughter, that he has to keep up. Should it please heaven to invest me in apron and gaiters, it would pain me inexpressibly to know that my son-in-law was capable of running—running with school-children.'

Then he turned slowly round and faced the church. 'I wonder that the ringers are not giving us a peal. I fear they are wetting their palms.'

The throng and noise about the bungalow door increased. Boys who were not on the doorstep thrust off such as were, and stepped into their places. Others had filled their pockets with burs and were tangling them in the hair of the girls. The mission woman and the Scripture reader, thrust together in the throng, glowered at each other, and prepared to plunge into controversy, when Mrs. Curgenven called to the schoolmaster, 'Don't you think, Mr. Dalby, it would be as well to set the children to sing till Captain Curgenven is ready for them?'

'Yes, madam, but the rector was displeased when I set them to sing when going to church.'

'Oh! that was quite another matter. There is a time and there is a place for everything. "Monkey-land" will do here, but not in the churchyard. Can you not see that, or must you be taught it? Really,' grumbled Jane Curgenven to herself, 'the obtuseness of some people is astounding.'

'Very well, madam, as you wish it. Children! Attention!'

In the stillness produced by his call, sounded the twang of the pitch-key, and then he began, 'Do—re—mi—,' when from the bungalow rang the report of a pistol.

The school-master did not start the song. The children ceased to quarrel. All held their breath.

'Bless me! has anything happened?' exclaimed Mr. Physic, and elbowed his way forward.

'It is nothing,' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'but the captain at his pranks again, just to frighten or amuse the children till he has all in readiness for them. He is full of tricks.'

The agent did not seem satisfied with the lady's explanation. He continued with haste and impatience to force his way to the door; he drove his body between the snarling mission woman and snapping Scripture reader, thrust the children aside with roughness, and only turned to beckon to his aid the churchwarden Jukes. 'Here! your burly help!'

Then a tall boy, with a blue ribbon in his buttonhole, came round the corner.

'Please! I've climbed up into the window, and looked in.'

'Well, and what have you seen?' asked Physic, almost fiercely.

'Please, sir, the captain is lying on the floor.'

'Here!' he hastily signed to Jukes, and drove his shoulder against the door. 'Stand off, you young hounds!' he said, and kicked the boys away. 'Clear from this, will you? School-master, call off your cubs.'

Then Jukes came to his aid, and drove his great muscular shoulder against the door, burst it open, and was within the bungalow next moment along with Physic, and a motley throng of school-children, monitors, visitors, Scripture reader, mission woman, sidesmen, all pressing and jamming one another in the door, in their eagerness to see whatever was to be seen.

What was to be seen was Captain Curgenven's body on the floor. He had blown out his brains. The explosion had set some of the machinery in motion—a parrot was swinging on a perch, opening and shutting its beak; a little Mr. Gladstone was chopping at a tree; a mill was turning its wheel and pattering hammers on a piece of glass.

The rector was coming along leisurely, and with dignity, when the second churchwarden rushed up to him with—

'Lord, sir! the captain has shot himself!'

The rector stood still for a moment, gasped, and said—

'Good heavens! what will people say?'

Then from the church tower burst forth the merry peal of bells, for the men by this time had wetted the palms of their hands. The old ivied tower reeled with the vibration, and was as though it laughed and staggered in its laughter over the changes and chances of the mortal life of foolish men.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE TRAP.

Mr. Physic was driving towards his home along the high-road; his face was troubled, for his mind was in agitation. He had managed the Curgenven property for the captain ever since the latter had succeeded to the estate, and the captain had left it pretty much in his hands to do with it what he liked. Spasmodically, at long intervals, Lambert Curgenven had declared he would go into the accounts, overhaul the vouchers, and satisfy himself that everything was as it should be. He had not only made this declaration, he had begun to carry it out, but the captain had not a clear business head. Figures puzzled him. He had not application except for what particularly interested him. He screwed down his attention to the completion of an ingenious toy, but could never induce his mind to fix itself on the financial condition of his estate. Consequently Mr. Physic had had an uncontrolled management of the revenues of the Curgenven property.

Now the captain was dead, and the agent did not know who would succeed him. If the property came to a man of business habits and of a practical bent, then it was possible that Mr. Physic's management would be brought to an abrupt termination. It was even possible that he might be called to task for certain matters connected with the management. And the danger menacing him was that mistrust of his judgment and straightforwardness might spread. It may be said that it was almost certain to spread from one squire who employed him to another, and the agency of more properties than Curgenven might be taken from him.

Mr. Physic screwed his brows together into one great knot over the root of his nose, and pursed up his lips as though endeavouring to adapt them to the utterance of a whistle.

The evening was beautiful, and the soft twilight hung over the hills like a delicate blush. But Mr. Physic had no eye for beauty, he did not even turn his eyes on the ridges that caught the glow, but they did fasten with interest on a figure walking along the road before him. He touched the cob with his whip, and shook the rein. The beast quickened its pace, and when the solicitor had reached the pedestrian, he drew up and said, 'Madam, may I offer you a lift? You are too late for the coach; she has passed the turn already, and there is not another till five minutes to this moment to-morrow evening. She leaves Liskeard at 8 A.M. in an opposite direction. I presume it is to Liskeard you want to go?'

'I am really too late?'

'Really—by five minutes. You must absolutely take my offer, or walk four miles in the dark. I won't say that our roads are infested with banditti, for, thank the powers, we are not in Italy or Spain, or Sicily or Greece, but four miles at night are—well—nine miles too many.'

The person addressed stood still and considered what was to be done.

'I thank you. I accept your kind offer.'

Mr. Physic extended his hand to assist the lady to mount. He studied her face with the advantage he had of being on a higher level, when she was engaged in planting her foot on the step and drawing her skirt to her from contact with the wheel.

The face was striking. It was handsome, the skin olive, delicate, and soft. The hair was so dark, that in the twilight it looked black. Probably, when the sun was on it, some colour might be found in it to redeem it from being really sable. The lady's age was undefinable. She was not a girl, but was in that debatable period which intervenes between youth and age, in which there is still roundness of feature, smoothness of skin; in which there is something superadded to the loveliness of girlhood, the lines and angles that give character to a face, a something different in kind from the simplicity of youth, a something that is also beautiful, and beautiful in a higher degree. In the girl is possibility, in the woman performance.

Suddenly, as the lady reached the seat, she turned and caught his inquiring or inquisitive eyes, and flashed them down. Physic hastily lashed the cob and drove on.

Then a slight pause ensued. Neither knew what to say. She, of course, desired to know who had offered her a seat by him, but could not ask the question. He was beating about in his mind how to extract from her the information he was resolved to obtain. Presently he turned his eyes furtively towards her, and said—

'I have the honour to address Mrs. Curgenven.'

'Yes, I am Mrs. Curgenven.'

'But not Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven?' he sniggered, as he thought how the lady who arrogated to herself that title had put him down, and how that now he had the opportunity of turning the tables on her.

The lady at his side made no reply. He continued: 'I have just come from Curgenven. I am the agent for the estate. I am the solicitor whom Captain Curgenven has always employed, and *who has been in his confidence.*' He laid great stress on the last words. Then, after a pause, he added, 'in all matters'—these words in what was intended as an aside.

She took no apparent notice of what he said. After another pause he went on: 'I have just come from Curgenven, as I told you. There is a queer kettle of fish stewing there.'

She still maintained her reserve and said nothing.

'A queer kettle. A particularly queer kettle, thanks to your appearing.'

'No thanks to me,' said the lady shortly.

''Pon my word, that's good! Oh, dear, no!—no thanks from any one. But you had a right there, and showed that you would maintain it.'

Again he was met with silence. He pressed his lips together and spitefully lashed the cob, then drew the rein. He did not desire to arrive at Liskeard before the ice was broken between them, and some confidence had been established.

To beat about was profitless, he rushed headforemost at the matter now.

'I know all about it—that marriage at Naples and that other affair at Malta.'

'What other affair?'

'Oh! I know.'

'I beg you will be explicit.'

'Whist! you made a clean bolt of it.'

'I left Malta. I was obliged to.'

'Oh—yes, *obliged.*'

She turned sharply round on him. 'Yes—obliged. What do you mean by that sneer?'

'Did I sneer? Oh, dear, I know nothing but what I have been told, you know. I have heard only the captain's story.'

'And what is his story?'

The agent chuckled to himself. He had unlocked her lips by attacking her.

'You may not like it. Tell me yours.'

'Not yet, I must know what he has said about me.'

Mr. Physic shook his head.

'You would perhaps kick out and swear; and you know the captain is dead?'

'Dead!'

She put her hand on the rein and arrested the horse.

'Not dead?'

'Yes—he has shot himself.'

The horse was at a stand. He could hear her pant for breath; he could feel, almost hear, the bounding of her pulses at his side.

'What else could he do,' asked the agent, 'when the first wife turned up whom he had supposed dead?'

'Let me get out! I cannot breathe! I must be alone!'

She put her left hand to the rail, and stretched her right hand to the splash-board to raise herself, but sank back on her seat again.

'You cannot get out. Nonsense, I will not allow it,' said the solicitor. 'You are not in a fit condition to be left alone.' He whipped the cob, and the gig was again rolling along.

Mr. Physic respected the agitation that had been produced by the startling announcement, and said nothing for full ten minutes. Then all at once the lady at his side drew a deep breath and said, 'I suppose so—he could do naught else. Sooner or later it must have been so.'

'He put himself in the wrong box altogether. Unless he had been sure—unless he had positive proof of your death, he ought not to have married.'

She was breathing heavily and painfully.

'If he couldn't get that, he should have sued for—but never mind that. Why, if you were to turn up, did you not turn up before?'

'I have made mistakes.' She spoke in a subdued tone; her chin was resting on her bosom, and she was looking steadily, but with a dazed eye, before her at the trotting horse.

'A good many,' said Physic.

She said nothing to this, but continued to look broodingly before her.

They were approaching the town, and the agent had not learned much; he became impatient.

'Now look here,' said he. 'Why have you remained latent, so to speak, for nineteen years, and have only now turned up?'

'I—we did not agree. We neither loved nor cared for each other. We were best apart.'

'Where have you been?'

'On the stage—on concert boards—everywhere.'

'And why do you turn up now?'

'I am weary of it. Weary, weary—sick to death.'

'And so you came to Curgenven for a home?'

'I came that some settlement might be arrived at.'

'Rather late in the day.'

'Till I began to inquire, I did not know where Lambert was. I did not know that he had come into a fortune. When we married he was poor, and had no prospects save in his profession, and they were not worth much.'

'Yes; he left the navy without having wrecked a vessel or provoked a mutiny. We may be thankful for that. The property came to him in the nick of time, when he was under a cloud. He had done some rash and stupid thing—in China, I think—against orders, and there would have been a court-martial had he not resigned. The property was something to resign on.'

'I knew nothing about that. We parted at Malta.'

'Yes, and then you made a clean bolt.'

'I was obliged. I was left without means. Lambert had forwarded nothing.'

'But there was the Marchese.'

She flared up into towering wrath. She turned on him, snatched the reins from his hand, and brought the loop down across his knuckles.

'How dare you insult me! Let me get out! I will not stay!'

She drew the horse up short; it had dashed ahead when it heard the cut of the reins and felt the jerk. She rose and would have left the gig, but Mr. Physic held her arm.

'Don't be foolish. Remember I know only the one side, and you asked me for that.'

'Is that the side? Did Lambert dare? If so, I am glad he is dead. Look here!' she was standing in the gig, and she turned, holding the splash-board with one hand. 'Look here! Had he dared to give his side—his side indeed!—in my hearing I would have shot him myself.'

'*De mortuis*—you know the saying. Sit down and be easy.' The agent assumed a coaxing tone. 'I know nothing but what I've been told, and I've been told, I'll be sworn, a pack of lies.'

She reseated herself angrily.

'Go on,' she said. 'Tell me all; I must hear it. What did he say about the Marchese?'

'No, thank you, not if I know it,' answered Physic, with an attempt to assume a comical air. 'After such a tingling rap over the knuckles I won't risk it. I'll tell you nothing myself till the tingle is gone out of them. So you came here to patch up a truce, and extort a settlement, I understand?'

'When I learned where Lambert was, and that he had inherited a fortune, I resolved to see him once more and demand of him some arrangement by which I might be able to live quietly and without being driven from pillar to post, an arrangement that would save me from being always struggling against difficulties. I did not desire much. I did not know, till I came to Liskeard, that he had married again.'

'Why did you remain lost so long, and allow him to make such a mistake?'

'I have told you. We could not agree. I have—do you know it?—wild blood in me, and that made me restless. I have been about in the States, in Canada. I was for a while in California, and on the boards at Frisco. I came back to England. I might have been married again and again, but I knew I could not. Though we saw nothing of each other, knew no more of each other, we were still bound to each other. Why did he marry?'

'There, I allow, he acted foolishly.'

'He acted wrongly,' said the lady, with vehemence. 'But he is dead, and no more against him. I was to blame. I should have let him know where I was, and what I was doing. I was proud, and nourished my resentment, and I never cared to inquire about him and learn anything about him. I was driven at last to swallow my pride and smother my resentment.'

'How so?'

'I had a long illness. I came to great poverty. My voice failed me, and I was weary, deadly weary, of the wandering, life, and the ups and downs—mostly downs—which made up that sort of existence. You see,' she flashed up into vehemence again, 'I have a double nature—one by birth, one by training. Born of a roving stock, bred to the quiet domestic life, for a while blood prevailed, and then culture provoked in me a great hunger for rest, for stability, for security. I came here—and he is dead! What now?'

'Aye! that is just what I am asking. What now?'

They were approaching the country town; a few detached villa residences occupied patches of land beside the road, but they were not many. Liskeard is not a place to which persons with independent means were much attracted. Suddenly, from over the garden railings of one of these, bounced a flaming globe that flared at the head of the horse, touched it, and sent the cob bounding in mad terror to the further side of the road, and before Mr. Physic was aware and prepared, had run into the hedge and was dashing at it, plunging, rearing to escape the volume of flame that had been tossed in the air and was now flickering in the road. The rein snapped when Physic endeavoured to master the frightened brute, and all control over it was lost.

The cob, regardless of everything save its own safety, ran the wheel of the dogcart up the hedge; the shafts snapped as matches, and the trap was thrown over, together with those in it, with violence, so that the agent and the lady fell in the roadway.

In the moment of falling Physic heard a man's voice say, 'There, Justinian, you've gone and done it!'

CHAPTER V.

NAPLES AND MALTA.

Lambert Curgenven had been a third son, with small prospect of succession to the family estate; so small, that no Jews would lend him money on it.

The eldest son and heir was married and had a child, a boy. But the eldest son was only eldest son to a second son. The head of the family was Justinian Curgenven, an old bachelor, and an old bachelor might marry in a fit of folly, and, after all, leave a child to inherit his acres. But the eldest son of the second son broke his neck in hunting. Soon after that the second son of the squire's brother fell a victim to cholera in India. Then the child died of croup, and finally Justinian, the squire, died of gout, and to no one's greater surprise and satisfaction than that of Lambert, Curgenven fell to his lot. It enabled him to retire from the navy at a moment when his remaining in it would have been inconvenient. He had been in command of a vessel in the China seas and had disregarded orders. He had landed the blue-jackets and had attacked and taken a fort, contrary to instructions, and a court-martial seemed inevitable. He had escaped it by resignation.

He left the navy and came to take possession of Curgenven. He was an amiable scatter-brain, liked and laughed at by all who knew him.

After a short while he proposed to and married the rector's daughter. Before doing this, however, he consulted Mr. Physic, and the substance of his communication was as follows. It must be premised that Captain Lambert was not able to tell any story, least of all his own, in consecutive form. Times, places, persons, incidents were tumbled out of his memory in confusion; but with some pains Physic was able to reduce them to order.

When he was lieutenant on board H.M.S. the *Catamount*, he was stationed for a while off Naples. The officers had given an entertainment on board, a dance, to those English, Americans, and Neapolitans who had shown them civilities and had invited them to dinner or to picnics on shore. At this dance there had been present an old lady, a Mrs. Fenton, with her adopted daughter, and the girl, aged but sixteen, was known as Miss Theresa Fenton. She was a handsome, dark-eyed, dark-haired girl, and she did not lack partners that evening. Lieutenant Curgenven took her to supper, and managed to secure three dances with her, whereas no other officer got more than one. In returning by boat from the vessel, Mrs. Fenton took a chill that brought on Neapolitan fever, and within a week she was dead.

The position of the girl, whose name was Theresa, was now a difficult one and eminently uncertain. Her protectress had enjoyed an annuity, and left nothing to Theresa, having had nothing to leave. The relatives of this lady in England had never regarded the girl with a favourable eye. They said that

Mrs. Fenton had picked her out of the gutter, and to the gutter she was welcome to return. They informed Theresa that there was nothing for her, and she must shift for herself. A suit of mourning they would graciously allow her, if it did not exceed a stipulated sum, and they reluctantly consented to pay her bill at the hotel-pension to the end of the month, *i. e.* for three weeks after the death of Mrs. Fenton. They further intimated to her that it would be advisable if, for the future, she discontinued calling herself Miss Fenton, and were to employ the name which properly belonged to her, which they believed was Warren.

This conduct of the relatives of the deceased lady was much commented on by those who were *en pension* at the hotel, as well as by such English as had made the acquaintance of Mrs. Fenton and her adopted daughter. They professed to feel very strongly on the subject; but though there was depth in their feeling on the cruelty of leaving a young girl unprovided for, it did not reach the depths of their pockets.

It was agreed on all sides that the Fenton family had behaved abominably, and they could not have ventured to behave in such a mean manner had the event taken place in England, under the observation of a censorious neighbourhood.

But, precisely for the same reason, those visitors who were in Naples endeavoured to emancipate themselves from responsibility in the girl. They were but visitors, birds of passage, and had taken only a passing interest in the orphan. Something, however, had to be done, and done at the least possible cost to themselves. As the Fenton family declined to be saddled with her, she must be saddled on some one else.

Lieutenant Curgenven was both amiable and soft, and, in addition, was much struck with Theresa's charms. The entire English and American community resolved that he must marry her.

He himself was half willing, and was cajoled, and flattered into declaring himself ready to be her champion. The entire English and American community breathed long respirations of relief when Lambert Curgenven married the girl; it was no concern of theirs that he had not in the least considered how he was to maintain her after they were married.

The Anglo-American community at Naples provided the wedding-breakfast, but then it also helped to consume it, and the community thanked its good luck that it had come off so cheap. The breakfast cost each subscriber fifteen liras, wine included. When next the subscribers attended the Embassy chapel, and heard about laying up store in heaven, they smirked with satisfaction at the knowledge that they had each fifteen liras laid up in the unassailable treasury above.

Moreover, all the subscribers to the wedding-breakfast took out the change over and above what they had consumed in comment on the conduct of those persons who had left Naples precipitately for Rome, it was believed to escape the subscription-list that was being talked of in aid of the destitute young lady.

After the marriage, a month passed happily enough, and then Lambert Curgenven awoke to the fact that he was obliged to maintain his wife, and that his lieutenant's pay was insufficient for the purpose. He had a little money of his own, very little, and having been a thriftless young fellow, putting his hand into his pocket when he ought to have kept it out, the small sum he had was expended, and he must wait till his new quarterage came before he could pay his wife's *pension* in the hotel. He then insisted on her moving to lodgings, which would be less expensive. She consented, but in the lodgings ready-money was required, and ready-money Lambert Curgenven had not got. A certain Neapolitan Marchese offered to relieve him of immediate embarrassment by a loan, and Lieutenant Curgenven at once accepted the offer, though he knew that this Marchese Gioberti had been a great admirer of Theresa, and had paid her assiduous court.

Then ensued scenes of mutual recrimination. Lambert was chafed because he could not repay his loan, annoyed because Gioberti called at the lodgings that had been taken for Theresa, was inclined to quarrel with the Marchese, but could not afford to do so owing to his debt, and consequently vented his ill-humour on his wife, wanting her to forbid the Marchese the house, when he ought to have done so himself.

Theresa, young and inexperienced, was offended at her husband's jealousy, resented his humours, and complained at the straits to which she was reduced for lack of necessaries. She could not understand her husband's pecuniary embarrassment, and made no allowance for his harassed temper. She had not had her heart touched by him, and his affection for her had been of a very flimsy and ephemeral quality.

Then the *Catamount* was ordered to Malta, and Lambert ordered his wife thither also, and was mightily relieved in mind that the Marchese was left behind. He solemnly promised to repay the loan within a twelvemonth, but at the same time felt a qualm in his conscience, for, if he did repay the sum, there would be nothing left for the maintenance of Theresa.

The marriage had been announced by him to his uncle the squire, Justinian Curgenven, and Justinian had acknowledged the tidings in churlish fashion. He had told Lambert he was a fool to marry a girl without a penny, and assured him that if he looked to him for assistance, should a family arrive, or any other embarrassments arise consequent on this step, he would look in vain. He had a pack of otter hounds, and otter hounds cost him all his loose cash, and gave him pleasure, whereas a pack of grand-nephews and nieces would and could afford him nothing save annoyance.

On reaching Malta all went smoothly for a while, till at the hotel where Theresa was the landlord became importunate for payment. With his usual carelessness Lambert on arriving in Malta had cast his troubles behind him, and had not given a thought to the future. His good-humour had returned, and Theresa found him an agreeable companion when he came on shore. But no sooner did the straitness of his means begin again to vex him, than he became peevish and uncertain in his mood, ready to take umbrage at trifles, to charge his wife with extravagance if she bought a pin, and to allow himself to order a hamper of champagne when out for a jaunt with friends to Gozo. When the beauty and youth of his wife made her the queen of a swarm of admiring officers, Lambert Curgenven became jealous, and yet he allowed himself to flirt with whatever pretty girl there was in Malta. Matters were soon across again between the pair, and when all at once the Marchese Gioberti appeared in the island, the jealousy of Lambert blazed forth, and a violent scene ensued between husband and wife. He ordered her immediately to go to England. She demanded the money which would enable her to return, and some arrangements to be made for her maintenance in England. As Lieutenant Curgenven could not furnish the money, and had not thought of where and how she was to live in England, he stormed to cover his retreat. After this they hardly met without a fresh quarrel.

The unsatisfactory condition of affairs was not a secret. The captain in command of the *Catamount* saw that before long Lieutenant Curgenven's pecuniary difficulties would cause a scandal, and a hint to the admiral in command of the Mediterranean fleet sufficed to obtain Lambert's recall to England, and appointment to the *Wagtail*, on the Pacific station.

Then all communication between Lieutenant Curgenven and his wife came to an end. He did not send her any money, because he had none to send, and he did not write, because he could not enclose a cheque in his letter. When he did hear from Malta, it was that Theresa had disappeared, and as the Marchese Gioberti had left at or about the same time, it was concluded that they had departed together.

This was quite sufficient for Lambert Curgenven to make him declare that he washed his hands of the whole business, and feel that he need no longer concern himself about his wife or his debt. He need not remit money to the woman who had been false to him, and he need not concern himself with an obligation to a man who had defrauded him of his wife. Lieutenant Curgenven had an easy conscience, and he readily convinced himself that matters stood as it best suited his purse that they should stand.

He spent some months in the China seas, and obtained a commandership, and finally blundered into committing a gallant act which he was not authorized to commit, and which was done in contravention of orders. Then he retired, and, as already stated, retired to the position of a country squire. He had been unlucky through the early part of his career, he hoped that now luck had turned, and was favouring him.

When he had settled himself into Curgenven, he found it dull to be solitary, and, as he said, Scripture assured him it was not good for a man to be alone, so he proposed to Miss Pamphlet, a handsome, taking girl, the daughter of the rector of his parish, and was of course accepted.

Then, when he had been accepted, he began to consider whether there was any impediment in the way to marriage, and he thought that possibly that matter of his previous union with Theresa Fenton in marriage ought to have been formally dissolved by the Divorce Court, or informally by the act of Providence in removing that lady. He spoke of the matter in a rambling, casual manner to Mr. Physic, and asked his opinion.

The solicitor's opinion was that some very decided evidence of the death of Theresa should be obtained ,and if that was not available, then such evidence should be collected as would justify an action in the Divorce Court. To this latter Captain Curgenven objected that it was no use ripping up old sores, and, further, that it would be expensive.

Moreover, argued Lambert Curgenven, he did not know whether Mr. Pamphlet might not interpose and forbid the marriage if any ugly stories were about and discussed, especially if they got into the papers, as divorce cases always do, and for his part, he was inclined to take for granted that Theresa was dead. He did write to Malta, and he empowered Physic to spend a hundred pounds in inquiries, but he was not prepared to throw away more. He professed himself to be morally certain that Theresa was dead. 'If she were not dead,' he argued, 'she would have rounded on him for money long ere this, especially when she learned that he had come in for a property. But not a word of her, or from her, had reached him since she left Malta along with that confounded Marchese.' That she had departed with the Marchese was a fixed idea in the head of Captain Curgenven. When he spoke to Physic of the disappearance of his wife, he spoke of it in association with the Marchese as a certain fact, without telling him that he had no further grounds for such an assertion than Maltese gossip.

Physic instituted inquiries in Italy, and ascertained that Gioberti was dead. He had died three years before, and no one in the family, as far as Physic could discover, knew, or would admit they knew, anything about Theresa. Gioberti, though a marquis, was without landed estates, and lived a rambling coffee-house life; he was said to have gone to Naples, and then to Malta, because he had delicate lungs and rheumatism.

Mr. Physic, after having spent forty pounds on researches, and paid himself sixty for instituting the researches, was obliged to admit to Captain Curgenven that his inquiries had produced absolutely no results. Theresa had not been traced. Presumably she was dead; but not a scrap of evidence of either her death or her infidelity had been discovered. 'Very well, then,' said Captain Lambert, 'you shut your mouth like a sensible man and say nothing. We will chance it. I am as morally certain that she is dead, as I am that I am a good fellow.'

It must be allowed that when Captain Curgenven told his story, or rather tumbled out the contents of his memory-basket before Physic, he did not lay all the blame on Theresa, but allowed that there had been fault on his side. 'But, bless me!' said he, 'what can you expect of a man when he is at his wits' ends for money? He can't be in a good humour, can he, Physic? I put it to you.'

Although he did admit that he had been to blame, he let the agent clearly understand that his blameworthiness was excusable, forced on him by circumstances; whereas the fault in Theresa was quite inexcusable, and was due to natural perversity or depravity—call it what you will. 'Then again, Physic, those people at Naples took a tremendous interest in us, and had made up their minds that we should marry. I was a young chap and easily persuaded. So I could not do otherwise. I put it to you. You are a man who knows the world.'

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE PILL-BOX.

'THERE, Justinian! now you've gone and done it!'

Mr. Percival Curgenven strode through his garden, there was not space in it for him to get up a run, and, leaning his elbows on the breasting of stone in which were fixed the rails that cut him off from the road, he looked between the bars, and said, 'By George, Justinian! you've gone and killed one or two! It's a case of manslaughter against you, and penal servitude.'

Looking a little more attentively in the dusk he distinguished the figures in the road—Physic struggling to his feet, the lady motionless. Then he exclaimed, 'By George, my boy! it's a bad job—confound your fire-ballooning!' He threw open the gate and ran out to lend assistance.

The cob had dashed along the highway with the broken shafts and the rein dangling from him. The dog-cart lay a mass of chips on one side. Mr. Percival Curgenven did not give it a thought.

'I'll bring an action against you,' cried Physic, reaching his feet. 'What infernal pranks— Oh! I beg pardon a thousand times. Mr. Percival, you don't mean to say it is you?'

'That boy of mine has been letting off a fire-balloon,' said Mr. Curgenven, 'but never mind that. Is the lady hurt?'

'Hurt—of course she's hurt. How could it be otherwise?

It's a miracle I'm not killed. Fetch a light, and let's see what is the matter with her.'

'Here's the remains of this darned fire-balloon flickering in the hedge,' said Mr. Percival Curgenven, wrapping his silk handkerchief round his fingers and laying hold of a wire connected with a flaming sponge saturated in spirits of wine, and which was all that remained of the ill-fated fire-balloon.

Mr. Percival Curgenven brought this over to where the lady lay unconscious in the road.

'I hope her neck is not broken,' said this gentleman, 'partly for your sake, Justin, and partly for hers.'

Mr. Percival Curgenven knelt by the prostrate woman and passed the flaming tow to and fro above her face. The eyes were closed, but not shut, and the light was reflected through the eyelashes.

'Why—who the deuce!—she's very like—but here, Justin, lend a hand, and, Physic, you also, if not broken to bits. We must not leave her in the road, but carry her into the Pill-box.'

The Pill-box was Mr. P. Curgenven's residence in the suburbs of Liskeard. It was a small—a ridiculously small villa. The former occupier of this house had been pleased to call it 'The Court,' and to have his letters addressed to him as a resident at 'The Court, Liskeard.'

When he departed, owing to the inability of the bankers to honour his cheques, Mr. Percival Curgenven had taken the house.

Said he, in his dry fashion, 'I don't see why a house any more than a beast should take its title from its least noble part. The rattlesnake and the wagtail are exceptions in the realm of animals. The back-yard, that measures twelve feet by ten, is the only court this house can speak of, and we had better say nothing about it. So I shall call it the "Pill-box"; then every one will understand that it is small, and that its owner has had something to do with medicine. I don't see the fun in lodges that lead to nothing, in granges that have not even a barn or outhouse attached to them, and in halls where there is hardly room to turn round in the passage.'

Mr. Percival Curgenven was a cousin of Mr. Lambert, and possessed some of the family fatality of making a muddle of life. He had been educated as a surgeon, and had walked the hospitals and bought a practice. Then, finding the practice he had purchased had been spoiled by the man from whom he bought it, by devotion to the bottle, he had been disgusted, had lacked the patience and resolution to work it up again, had thrown it up, had tried art, failed in that, and then had rushed away to the Californian gold-fields, where he had indeed found some nuggets, and raked together some gold-dust, but he had allowed himself to be robbed of his nuggets, and had let the gold-dust run away between his fingers till nothing remained but fingers.

Then he returned to England in worse predicament than when he went out; for he went out a single man, he returned a widower with a son. Consequently he had to feed two mouths and clothe two backs instead of one.

Happily for him, his return to England coincided with the accession of his cousin Lambert to Curgenven. The cousins had been friends and play-fellows as boys, and Lambert was determined to secure the presence in his neighbourhood of a man of his own kidney, who had knocked about the world, and was not starched and heavy like the country squires of the district, men who had hardly left their paternal acres, and cared for little beyond board and bench business. In the exuberance of his pleasure at seeing his cousin again, he undertook to provide him with an income of a hundred and fifty pounds per annum during his own life, on the sole condition that Percival should live within nine miles of him. Lambert had kept his word; he had not been very punctual in his quarterly payments, because he lacked the faculty of punctuality. If a month elapsed after quarter-day and no cheque had been received, Percival wrote and reminded him that he had been forgotten, and in most cases Lambert expressed his penitence at the oversight by adding a five or ten pounds to the sum due. On one occasion, with his customary carelessness, he sent the cheque twice over, and when Percival returned the second, Lambert refused to receive it back. He had made a mistake, he said, and must abide by the consequences. The only way in which he could teach himself business habits, he said, was by making himself suffer for his errors. On a hundred and fifty pounds, Mr. Percival was able to make both ends meet. He had not expensive tastes, and his boy's education made no great hole in the hundred and fifty pounds, for his boy was given next to none. On the evening on which our story opens, this son, Justinian, was engaged on letting off a fire-balloon just as the dog-cart approached. He had summoned his father from the smoking-room to witness the exhibition. The balloon had been caught by the wind and swept over the garden-wall, into the highway, just as the dog-cart came up.

The wind had turned the globe over, the silver paper had ignited, and the whole flaming mass had been carried against the head of Mr. Physic's cob. It was enough to have frightened a beast with cart-horse nerve; it would have sent a shiver down the back of even an earth-worm.

The unconscious woman was taken into the house, and laid on the sofa in the diminutive parlour.

Mr. Percival with promptitude and skill examined her, and then said, turning his head to Physic, who had thrown himself into an easy-chair to recover the effects of his fall and shaking, 'The collar-bone is broken, and there is a slight congestion of the brain.'

'Indeed!' said the agent, who was groping about his own limbs to discover if he were sound in every member. 'I suppose I'm all right—but I don't know.'

'Oh, you are not hurt. Where does she live? She must be taken home.'

'Live! Lord, how am I to know?'

'Who is she?'

Mr. Physic remained silent. To tell who she was would entail too long a story. He was not sure whether Mr. Percival had been taken into confidence by the squire relative to the first marriage.

'You know, Physic, I can't lodge her in the Pill-box. For one thing there isn't room; for another, 'twouldn't be proper. Where does she hang out?'

'I'm blessed if I know.'

'And you don't know who she is? That's awkward.'

'I picked her up on the road. She was walking from Curgenven. I gave her a lift.'

'And that is all you know about her? By George! this is awkward. How can she be accommodated in the Pill-box? I'd do anything right and kind to a poor devil—a she-one no less than a he—but I can't, I haven't the space in which to be kind. There ain't a spare bedroom in the box. I can't turn Justin out, and send him to sleep in the pig-sty, for there isn't a pig-sty to the place. I can't go out myself and let her have my room—not very easily; and as for that old beldame Bathsheba, she'd make such a to-do if I proposed that the poor creature should have her room and that she should go elsewhere, that I wouldn't risk it. It's a confounded nuisance. We must find out something about her, and where she lives. You don't even know her name?'

Physic hesitated; then said, 'It wouldn't do, would it, to ask a lady who and what she was when you offered her a lift?'

'Is she a lady? Well, I suppose so. I've seen her somewhere before, but, bless me—I don't know when.'

He took the lamp in his hand and went over to the prostrate woman on the couch, and let the light fall on her face.

At this moment she opened her eyes.

'Bless me!' exclaimed Percival, 'it's La Lamberta! Signora, do you remember me?'

The lady, still dazed, and without the light of intelligence in her large dark eyes, dropped her feet from the sofa and sat upright. She tried to move her arm, and failed. This seemed to puzzle her.

'No, my dear,' said Mr. Percival, 'very sorry, but you cannot use that hand. I must strap you up; you have got broken bones, and must be put in such a condition that they shall splice themselves. You will have to keep that arm screwed to your bosom for some time to come. You've had a bad spill, Signorina, and the road was hard. But you are in good hands, I won't forget old times. Bless me! don't you remember me at Frisco, eh?'

The large dark eyes of the lady rested on the speaker with some inquiry in them, but not much. She was not sufficiently recovered from the jar of the fall to have her senses at command.

She, however, made no opposition to being treated by the skilful hands of Mr. Percival.

'Now look here, Physic, and you too, Justin. There is no surgery in this little house. There wouldn't be room for one if I wanted it. One passage, one sitting-room, one dining-room, that serves also as smoking-room, as we give no dinner-parties. That's all the accommodation we have on the first floor. So, as I have to attend to this lady, you make yourselves scarce. You, Physic, can pick up the chips of your dog-cart, they are worth saving, they will make excellent kindling for the fires at home, and Justinian shall run into the town and find out what has become of the horse. I shan't be long.'

'Why do you call her La Lamberta?' asked Physic inquisitively as he stood in the doorway.

'Because I knew her at Frisco as La Lamberta. Is not that good reason? Come, I'm not going to answer questions now, I must attend to my patient. Look sharp, or all the chips will be carried off to light other fires than your own.'

When the room was clear of the agent and Justin, Mr. Percival Curgenven bound the lady's arm and strapped it to her so that she could not move it.

'Now tell me, where are you staying?'

'At the milliner's, Miss Treise's.'

'Then, as soon as you can walk, I will escort you thither. If you cannot walk, I will run for a cab.'

She stood up, took a step or two forward, turned giddy, and was caught and led back to the sofa.

'No—you cannot manage it. What is more, you must remain here for an hour or so till you have recovered the fall that has shaken you. Sit down, I will give you tea—I'll make it directly. Do you remember me?'

The dreamy eyes of the lady rested again upon him. Her lips parted, but she did not speak.

'Well,' said Mr. Percival, 'you see my memory is better than yours; or, perhaps, I may flatter myself with thinking that the spill has confused you, so that you do not remember me just at this present moment.'

Mr. Percival Curgenven rang the bell. An old woman with a grim face answered it.

'Bathsheba,' said he, 'tea, at once. This lady is faint and ill—thrown out of a carriage.'

The servant retired, muttering to herself.

'That's her way,' said Mr. Curgenven. 'She's a good old soul, nursed me when a baby, and takes advantage of this now to be crusty and rude. But she means no harm, she loves me as my soul, and Justinian a thousand times better than me. Do you recollect the little Justinian? What, not at Frisco? We were in the same little hotel. Down on my luck there, the poor wife ill, and how good and kind you were to her! Now do you recollect? You were La Lamberta then—what are you now?'

Her eyes were intently fixed on him; she was making an effort to collect her scattered senses and recall the past.

'Do you not remember?' he continued; 'you took my dear wife's place in the theatre at San Francisco when she was ill. You were staying in the same hotel with us. You laughed when you heard what was the name of my boy. I don't believe my wife ever properly recovered his birth, though he was born two years before her last illness. But she battled on, brave soul that she was, she would not give in, and I—I was an ass, and earned nothing. You were so kind when she was sick and worried and weak because unable to fulfil her engagement. Poor dear! she was always hoping she would pull through—she hoped to the end of the chapter. Do you remember you said Justinian was too much of a name for such a little chap as my boy? I said it was a family name, and that was true. We called you Signora, or Signorina Lamberta, but of course I knew you were no Italian. You were posted all over the town as La Lamberta. Now, surely, you remember! What are you now? I mean, what is your real, not your professional name. Not La Lamberta at Liskeard, I take it.'

Then she said, 'I am Mrs. Curgenven.'

Mr. Percival stared, drew back a step, and studied her with astonishment. He supposed that his patient had gone off her head.

Then suddenly she clasped her hand—the only one she could use—over her eyes, burst into tears, and sobbed, 'I am very miserable. After nineteen years I see my husband—and he shoots himself.'

'My dear Signora,' said Mr. Percival, 'here comes the tea. You are gone clean crazed. Take that, and I will compound something that shall compose your nerves. Mrs. Curgenven—Mrs. Fiddlesticks!'

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE MILLINER'S.

A few days later, Theresa was seated in a little parlour above the dressmaker's shop in Liskeard, where were her lodgings.

This parlour of Miss Treise's was small, but the pattern on the wall-paper was large and pretentious, one of those self-assertive papers that cannot be kept in the background and obscured by any amount of furniture and of decoration in a room. There is effrontery in designs on paper and cretonne, as there is in certain human faces. Two large body-coloured pictures, one of Vesuvius quiescent, the other of Vesuvius in eruption, were hung upon the walls. Neapolitan skies and Mediterranean seas were exaggerated in blueness on the first, and the artist had done his utmost with vermilion and lemon-yellow to produce an effect of fire in the second; but these pictures were modest and harmonious in tone compared with the wall-paper, which seemed to jostle frames and pictures in insolent self-assertion.

On a sideboard, under a glass bell that was cracked, stood a stuffed gull, mangy with moth. The brown, empty cocoons out of which the insects had hatched hung in the down, and the moths themselves strewed the sanded base. After having been hatched out they had found themselves imprisoned under the bell glass, and had perished there. Three papier-maché heads of ladies, with very staring blue eyes, pink cheeks, and black hair, stood also on the chiffonier. They were blocks on which Miss Treise tried bonnets, and submitted them to the approval of customers. In one corner of the apartment was a wickerwork structure, something like that which we are informed was employed by the Druids for enclosing human victims to be burnt as sacrifices. This structure was, however, not intended for any other purpose than the shaping and showing off of gowns, mantillas, &c. One whole corner of the room was blocked off by a cheval glass, in which ladies might admire themselves when costumed in the preparations of Miss Treise's genius and dexterous hands.

There was, happily, no round table in the middle of the apartment, so that it was practicable to move about in it.

The little upper parlour of Miss Treise's was in fact her show-room, and the room in which ladies were measured for their garments, and were fitted, on fixed dates subsequent to the measuring.

When Miss Treise let her spare bedroom, she allowed Theresa the use of this parlour when not wanted; specifying that whenever a customer appeared, the lodger was to disappear into her bedroom at the back, and not emerge from it again to re-occupy the show-room till the customer had departed.

In this room, and in the window, sat Theresa. Her left arm was bound across her bosom, the hand on a level with the right shoulder. Her face was much paler than when she had appeared on the terrace of Curgenven. It then bore the impress of care, but now this expression was deepened. Pain of body, distress of mind through grief over what had occurred, and doubt as to the future, had conspired to make her look wan and ill. There were traces of tears on her long dark lashes, and the eyes were sunken. Her fine lips quivered as she spoke. Theresa was a woman of strength and determination, but she was now shaken in mind as in body, and was unnerved. With youth she had possessed confidence. She had looked into the future without alarm, without asking what it had in store for her, with that faith, that confidence in destiny, that is given to youth, and this had imparted buoyancy to her spirits and brightness to her manner. But youth was past. Fortune had failed her. Fate had played her cruel tricks. Health had declined, and now, at the moment when she thought that she had reached a point at which uncertainty might cease, by the suicide of Captain Curgenven all had become as doubtful as before.

She had not been to the funeral that day. She could not have gone had she purposed, for she felt that she was hardly recovered sufficiently from her fall to bear the motion of a vehicle, and, what was more, had not the money wherewith to defray the hire of one. She had seen in the little local paper a notice of the inquest, and had learned from it that the jury had unanimously found that the death was accidental. How could it be otherwise, when the squire had met with no pecuniary losses, when he was more than usually cheerful, and intent on amusing the Sunday-school children with his mechanical contrivances; when he was blessed with the happiest family concord? There were absolutely no grounds on which the jury could suspect that the death was not accidental, and so accordingly they adjudged it. The fact of Captain Curgenven being son-in-law to the Reverend James Pamphlet was in itself a guarantee that everything about him, his death included, was correct, was respectable.

'Now, ma'am,' said Miss Treise, in a tone sharp and high-pitched, the reverse of that in which she addressed her customers, on whom she cooed like a dove, 'Now, ma'am, I'm exceeding sorry, but I can't help it. I'm particularly sorry because of your accident, and I wouldn't for the world seem cruel and unfeeling, and all that sort of thing; but I'm a lone unmarried lady, and lives by the work of my hands, and can't afford it. If you'll be good enough to pay me something, I'll try and be content. I can't be expected, you know—me, an unmarried lady—to maintain you as well as myself.'

'I am distressed,' said Theresa, in a dead, dispirited tone. 'I had a very small sum remaining, and I expected that it would last till—till I had obtained what I came here for. I have been disappointed——'

'Yes, ma'am, I understand,' said Miss Treise shortly; 'came begging and was refused, and I am to suffer. I thought, when you looked at my rooms, as you was a real lady, and not one of your so-to-speak sharpers.'

'I beg your pardon, I have been disappointed where I had every confidence of success. I had in this neighbourhood some one related to me by marriage, and I thought he would have provided for my future. He is dead. I have no hope left.'

'And I am to suffer! It ain't in reason—it ain't fair. Give me a reference. Say who it was. Tell me some one to whom I can apply for certainty that I shall be paid in the end, and I'll put up with this a little longer.'

'I can give you no name.'

'I don't believe a word of your story, then,' said Miss Treise. 'It's all a make-up; and if I hadn't Mr. Curgenven's assurance, I should say the broken collar-bone was fudge also!'

'Then you will turn me out! Well——'

'I only ask for some satisfaction that I shan't be cheated,' said Miss Treise. 'Thinking as you was a lady born and bred, I let my rooms, and very beautiful rooms they be; and I've taken in double portions of meat and loaves, and milk and butter, and what not. There was a pot of marmalade—thinking you was a real lady—cost tenpence, we get at co-operative store price for ready-money, and I paid tenpence for that there marmalade, real Dundee, I did. You don't suppose as I indulge myself in Dundee marmalade, do you? But as I thought you was a real lady, and had money, I ordered it and put it on the table at breakfast, and had two cup puddings made out of it. I'm a lone unmarried lady, and obliged to support myself. I'm now in black for my mother, my aged parent, as was a cruel sufferer for many years, and the doctor's bill was twenty-five pounds, and the funeral cost twelve pounds ten-and-eightpence. You don't suppose I can pay thirty-seven pounds ten-and-eightpence and have Dundee marmalade, do you?'

'I really am sorry.'

'Sorrow won't pay me,' pursued Miss Treise, who had worked herself up into acutest asperity; 'and there were soles I had of the fish-cart, only Friday last, one-and-eight, thinking as you was a real lady. If I hadn't, I'd have bought flounders, dabs; but being as I supposed a proper lady, I had soles. When am I to see my money again?'

'I did hope,' said Theresa, 'that if I were disappointed, I might have worked out what I owed with my fingers. I am natty and clever with them. But——'

'Oh, yes; but now you can't because of the collar-bone; and you suppose I'll keep you on till you're well, for the sake of what you can do then? And who's to pay Mr. Curgenven?'

'I do not think he will bring in a bill. I nursed his wife once in San Francisco when she was very ill.'

'Oh!' said Miss Treise, and the roughness went out of her voice. 'Oh, you know something of Mr. Curgenven, do you, ma'am? You think he'll see that I'm not left unpaid?'

'Indeed, indeed!' said Theresa, flushing, 'I entreat you say nothing about this to him. No; he is not responsible in any way for my debts. Here—take this gold watch and chain. Take it off my neck; I cannot well myself, because of my disabled arm. And here, on my left hand, is the guard-ring; it has a ruby in it and is worth something. Take that also, and raise what you can on the watch and chain and ring; they were given me by my husband when we married.'

'Your husband! Is he dead?'

'Yes; dead!'

'Been dead long?'

'He is dead. Take these articles. Here, pull this ring off; my hand is tied up and the fingers swollen with the straps. You must pass a thread under it, and then wind the thread round the finger beyond the ring. That will compress the swelling and the ring will come off. What these articles will bring in will pay you and leave something over till I am better able to go, and then—I will go away.'

She looked dreamily out of the window. The thought came up in her mind, whither should she go?

'Well, ma'am,' said Miss Treise, in a subdued voice, 'I really wouldn't if I could help it. I always said you was a real lady, and now I'm sure of it. We'll see what we can do with the watch and the ring. Mr. Jope, the goldsmith, is a friend of mine, a sort of cousin through my mother, and I know you can trust him to do right by you, and give you what these gee-gaws are really worth.'

She put her hand to her bosom—the milliner's pincushion—and drew thence a threaded needle, which she passed under the ring on the stiff finger of Theresa's left hand, and began to wind the cotton about the finger.

Theresa thought, with a bitter sense in her heart, that she was parting with the only things remaining to her of her deceased husband's gifts, on the very day on which he was committed to the earth. She had never loved him—never really cared for him. His conduct during the brief period in which they had been together had not been calculated to inspire love, even regard. She had been a mere child when she took him, and she took him in the moment of helplessness, when she had no one else to look to for support; but hardly had she been united to him, before she found that he was the most unstable of men, a creature of caprice, who had made no preparation for her future, and who dropped her the moment his opportunity for so doing came. She had not loved him—she had not cared for him; but now that he was dead she thought of him with exceeding pity, and with regret that she should have been unwittingly the means of shortening his days. No doubt he had been guilty of a grave fault, and when this was brought home to him by her reappearance, he did not know how otherwise to escape the consequences than by putting an end to himself. The fault was his, not hers; yet she had been the means of bringing the punishment down on him.

Whilst Miss Treise was engaged on Theresa's ring, and just as she had exclaimed, 'Now it is on the move—it is sliding off the finger!' the door opened and Mr. Percival Curgenven came in. He had but just returned from the funeral, and was in his black suit, with hat bound with crape, and had new black kid gloves on his hands.

'Excuse me running up,' said he, 'the girl said Miss Treise was here. I've just seen my poor cousin gathered to his fathers, and, by Jingo—but what are you doing there to the Signora's hand? Miss Treise, you are not meddling with the bandages, I hope?'

'Oh, no, sir!' answered the dressmaker promptly, 'I'm only taking off the ring.'

'Taking off the ring? Does it hurt her?'

'No, sir, but I'm going to take it to Mr. Jope to prize it. You see, sir, I'm a lone unmarried lady, and my afflicted parent— No, ma'am, it's no use your plucking at me and frowning, I will speak the truth. It's just this, Mr. Curgenven. The lady here—I make no doubt she is a real lady—has not been able to pay for her board and lodging, and I can't afford to keep her here for nothing, so we are going to dispose of her ring and watch and chain, that is all, sir. I said if she'd any one she knew, and could refer me to, as would stand to her that I should receive my money, I wouldn't press her no more; but as she couldn't do that, and no one has a right to luxuries, as a watch and chain and ring, who hasn't paid for her bread-and-butter, let alone the sole and Dundee marmalade, she gave me authority to raise a little money on them trinkets she has.'

A flame started to Theresa's cheeks, and she bowed her head. She was angry and vexed, ashamed that her necessity should be known, angry at the greed of the woman who took advantage of the opportunity to almost force Mr. Curgenven to offer the requisite money.

'Look here, Miss Treise!' said Mr. Percival. 'You cut down-stairs and make out your bill, and bring it me. I am in debt to the Signora—have been for years, and never paid it off. I'll do it now.'

When the dressmaker had disappeared: 'Signora—at low water-mark?'

Theresa bent her head.

'So am I—ebb tide—frightful. Only think—had four thousand a year offered me with one hand, and with the other every penny I have to live on snatched from me. But, by George! Signora, that shan't interfere, I'll help you all I can, and in every way. We have-nots make the best comrades.'

'How have you lost?'

'My own cousin, to whose funeral I have been, had made a will before he married constituting me his heir. Then he married, and the fact of his marriage nullified the will—and he made, it seems, no fresh one, so I am left out in the cold. He had always given me a small annuity, and by his death I lose that. But I am a man and have my energies. I'll shift somehow. I am concerned for you—I wish I knew how to help you.'

Then into the room was shown Mr. Physic.

'Now, ma'am,' said he, 'what do you say to this? There's a fortune in your hands—four thousand—to give to one or another, and none of it to stick to your fingers unless you bring the matter into court, and see what is to be got there, with my help. What do you say to that?' He looked round, saw Mr. Percival, started, and said—

'There, there, I'm talking nonsense. I don't mean it, I was joking. The fact is, I am a wag.'

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. CURGENVEN, NUMBER TWO.

'How do, ma'am!' said Mr. Physic, entering the boudoir where Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven was engaged at her secretaire of rosewood writing letters.

There was veiled defiance in the tone of voice, and Mrs. Curgenven looked up in surprise, for she was accustomed to deference from every one, the agent included.

'Well!' she said in a hard tone, as she drew about her a moral panoply of steel, 'what is it to-day, Mr. Physic?'

'I have ventured—although it be early days—so soon after the funeral, to drive over, Mrs. Curgenven.'

'Mrs.——?'

'Mrs. Curgenven,' repeated Physic, with a tone of triumph in his manner and voice; 'not, in matter of fact, of Curgenven, who, however, considers herself as such by right.'

The widow resumed her writing, with a toss of the chin and a short snort.

Mr. Physic waited. He had his hat in his hand, and he worked round the brim with his fingers before he spoke again. The lady continued writing as though unconscious of his presence.

Presently he said, 'I beg pardon, but I think it advisable that the two Mistresses Curgenven should meet and have the matter out between them. We don't want to have a disturbance and a talk, and have an uproar over the matter.'

'Excuse me,' said Mrs. Curgenven, continuing to write, 'I am engaged this morning. Waters ought to have said so. I have letters.'

'I think it would be advisable, ma'am, if you would let the letters wait and not postpone this matter. It must be brought to a head in one way or other, either privately or publicly. Which would you prefer?'

'I presume, from your manner, that you have been enlisted to act for that person. Very well. I shall find some one else to act for me, if necessary, to defend me against impostors and their abettors.'

The agent coloured slightly. There had existed a covert feud between him and the lady ever since the marriage of Captain Lambert. She had used her influence with her husband to get him to either take the management of his estate into his own hands or to put the accounts before a competent auditor, who would thoroughly investigate them, and satisfy her mind whether Physic was dealing with them honourably and honestly. But the captain was inert and good-natured, with a vein of scepticism in his soul. He argued that probably Physic was no worse than another, and that he himself might fall into less scrupulous or less competent hands if he changed his agent; that if he were defrauded it must be of small sums, and that the payment he made for Physic's services was small; that if he got another agent he might have to pay twice the salary and get worse cheated, so that it was best for him to let things remain as they were.

Physic was well aware that he had had Mrs. Curgenven as his antagonist for the last seventeen years, and he had never been quite certain whether she would not prevail in the end over the squire by persistence and succeed in dislodging him. If the property were to come to Mrs. Curgenven in trust for her daughter, according to the provisions of the marriage settlement, then he was quite certain that his connection with it was at an end.

Mrs. Curgenven persisted in writing. Her brows were knitted, and she breathed in snatches; she was incensed at the insolence and persistency of the man.

'I beg pardon, madam,' said Mr. Physic, 'Mrs. Curgenven is in the fly from Liskeard at the door.'

'I do not choose to see the woman.'

'But really it is necessary that you should. The matter must be sifted out. Let it be done quietly and privately, not in a court.'

Mrs. Curgenven threw down her pen, and turned sharply round.

'Mr. Physic,' said she in an imperious tone, 'that this creature is an unfortunate, I am well aware. It is really monstrous that on the day following the funeral of Captain Curgenven a painful and slanderous charge against him should be raked up—painful and mean to me, his widow, slanderous to his memory.'

'It cannot be avoided, madam. This is a matter that is not to be burked.'

'Mr. Physic,' she spoke with composure due to her pride, 'it is, I allow, possible—mind, I do not say probable, for that it is not—but *possible* it is, that in early life Captain Curgenven may have done foolish, even culpable things. I did not then know him. He was not then under my—I mean I was not then his wife. What he may have done as a boy I cannot say, as I do not know what were the principles in which he had been brought up, and what sort of chaplain there was to the vessel in which Mr. Lambert was then serving, but that there was any such entanglement as you seem to imply is preposterous. I will not listen to the suggestion. *I* am Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

'Will you not see this lady? She is at the door.'

'Most assuredly not. I am a clergyman's daughter. If I could be any good to her—get her into a Magdalen Home, or something of the sort, I would see what I could do, but to be browbeaten and insulted——' She swung herself round on her seat, took up the pen again, and began to write, or pretend to write.

'This unfortunate, as you are pleased to designate her,' said Physic, 'holds your destiny and fortune in her hands, and is unfortunate in this respect, that she has the giving of the acres of Curgenven, and none of the earth sticks to her fingers; if she establishes her position, she will have only what can be got for her as widow. All depends, as far as you are concerned, on what her decision will be—to whom are to go the four thousand a year.'

'Four thousand stuff and nonsense!' exclaimed Mrs. Curgenven.

'I am sorry to find you so unwilling to enter into this matter privately. It will be far from agreeable to you to have it blazed abroad in all West of England papers, to have it talked and laughed over by all your neighbours and acquaintances. You will have to vacate this house, and that unfortunate, as you term her, will turn you out of it.'

'Indeed!'

'Indeed she will.'

'And take my place here?' sneered Mrs. Curgenven.

'That I do not assert. She will receive her widow's portion granted by court. You might make terms with her now if you chose. She is extremely poor, and for a few pounds might be induced to waive her claim.'

'Oh! now the truth is coming out. This is an attempt to extort money. I knew as much. She has empowered you to act as intermediary.'

'Not at all. Not a word has passed between us relative to such a transaction. I, in the interests of the family, suggest it. Anything would be better than a scandal. I may tell you now, ma'am, that I knew of this marriage, and a genuine marriage it was, for Captain Curgenven confided the facts to me when he proposed his union with yourself. The marriage took place at the Embassy in Naples.'

'What is your evidence?' asked Mrs. Curgenven contemptuously.

'I have only the word of the late Captain Lambert, and that of the lady he married.'

'Which latter is not worth a rush. You misunderstood my husband. He can have said, and did say, nothing of the sort.'

'I have written to Naples for the certificates.'

'Even if you get them, I will not believe them. Such things are easily manufactured.'

'But a court might not share your opinion,' said Physic. 'And if you persist in refusing to come to a private arrangement, the matter must be gone into in a court of law. You are aware that if the marriage be established, then the will of Captain Curgenven comes into force. In the event of his having been free when he married you, then, of course, the marriage settlement has legal value, not otherwise. If it be proved that he was married and his wife alive when he contracted his union with yourself——'

Mrs. Curgenven started to her feet.

'I cannot endure this insolence! I cannot! I will not!'

'You had better hear me out. I will put the whole matter before you with as much consideration for your feelings as may be, and, believe me, I am acting in your own interest and in that of Miss Alice, and of the whole Curgenven family, in urging the settlement of the matter between the four walls of a private chamber.'

Mrs. Curgenven reseated herself. She set her lips. She was highly incensed, not alarmed.

'If, then, through certain reasons, the will of Captain Curgenven take effect, then this whole estate passes at once to Mr. Percival. Captain Lambert drew up his will after he succeeded to the property, and when he and Mr. Percival had met. At that time the captain believed he was married, and separated from his wife, and he did not accordingly suppose he could marry again. He was greatly embittered against the lady he had married, and when he made his will he bequeathed everything to his Cousin Percival, and to Mr. Percival's son, Justinian, after him. He made no provision whatever for his wife, he did not allude to her in his will.'

Mrs. Curgenven listened, but pretended to be writing.

'Afterwards, when Captain Curgenven had proposed to yourself, madam, he consulted me about his entanglements. I, of course, urged him to make inquiries relative to the person whom he had married, or supposed that he had married.'

Physic saw the lady's hand contract on her pen spasmodically when he referred to the marriage as a fact, and her hand only relaxed when he added the words which admitted of it as supposititious.

'He authorized me to expend a hundred pounds in inquiries, but we learned nothing. Perhaps we instituted our search in the wrong direction. Be that as it may, our inquiries were resultless, we could find no trace of the lady whom Captain Lambert had married, or thought it possible that he may have married. Then he proceeded to contract his union with yourself, madam.'

Mrs. Curgenven dropped a blot of ink on the letter, uttered a gasp of vexation, and proceeded first to apply blotting-paper to the page, and then to tear the note up, take a fresh sheet, and recommence the letter.

'After his marriage with yourself, madam, I strongly advised the captain to tear up his will, and to execute another, making provision for yourself, and constituting Miss Alice his heiress, should the present contingency arise; that is to say, should it be discovered that his second marriage was invalid. I urged this, not once but again and again, but the captain was very shy of doing what I advised. He was afraid of this will turning up after his death and telling a story he desired should not be known, and which need not be known should the first wife never reappear. He was continually hoping that some news might reach him relative to her death. If that had taken place subsequent to his marriage with yourself, his intention was to confide the matter to you and be remarried to you without any one but your own selves being the wiser for it. Unhappily, Captain Curgenven did not follow my advice. He was a man to postpone to an indefinite future the doing of things that were unpleasant. Had he drawn up this second will——'

'He did not do it,' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'for the best of all reasons, because it was unnecessary.'

'Unnecessary, madam! You will soon experience the consequences. You and Miss Alice are left utterly unprovided for.'

'And you dare to insinuate—nay, to assert, that my poor husband ought to have made a will in which he described me as his mistress, and Alice as his illegitimate child!'

'So only could you obtain anything.'

'He never did that. He could not have done it. Neither Alice nor I would accept one farthing under such a will as that. I defy you to prove a previous marriage!'

'Very well, madam. Of course, if you force us to it, we must proceed legally. I am sorry. It would have been so much better to have come to an arrangement without notoriety. You must consider, if this does become public, that it is you, you alone who are dragging the character of Captain Lambert first in the dirt, and then through the mouths of the public. How the Reverend Mr. Pamphlet will like this, I am no judge to decide.'

Mrs. Curgenven was staggered for the first time. She laid down her pen and stood up.

'If this unpleasant affair comes into court, and the decision is given against you by law——'

'Oh, law! law!' said the lady. 'Courts are as generally in the wrong as in the right. I have no opinion of them.'

'Possibly you may judge rightly; but supposing that your claim to be Mrs. Curgenven should be legally disallowed, by what name will you be known? By what name will Miss Alice be known? Will you be Miss Pamphlet again?'

Mrs. Curgenven turned livid for a moment. Then the blood rushed into her face.

'I am a clergyman's daughter! I am Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven! If the law decide in favour of fraud and imposture and wickedness of every kind, I am sorry for it. But I am Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven. It is infamous that this vile, this insulting claim should be trumped up when Captain Curgenven is no more alive to defend himself, and to maintain his honour!'

'Yes, he is dead,' said Physic. 'Do you know what he said to me one day, when I warned him of the rashness of his conduct in marrying again without evidence that his first wife was dead? "By Jove!" said he to me, "if Theresa were to turn up again, I should shoot myself; there'd be no other way out of it." She did turn up, and he did shoot himself.'

'It was accident, pure accident. So the coroner proved.'

'Yes, because the jury and he had not the facts submitted to them on which they could come to any other conclusion.

Now, had you not best see the lady who asserts that she was married to Captain Curgenven?'

'I do not choose to see her. If she is in the fly at the door, let the fly take her back again. She shall not cross and pollute the threshold of this house so long as I am mistress in it!'

'I pray you, madam, be reasonable. You are labouring under a delusion when you assume that the lady outside is an unfortunate. She will very soon establish her right to be called by that name which you have arrogated to yourself for seventeen years, and then you will have to content yourself with being Miss Pamphlet.'

'This is intolerable. You are taking advantage of my being unprotected by any gentleman in the house. I must have my father here. Let him be summoned.'

'Very well, he shall decide. He will understand the gravity of the situation. I will, with your leave, touch the bell and send for the rector.'

'As you choose.'

'And then, may I bring the lady in here, that the matter may be gone into fully between us four?'

'No,' said Mrs. Curgenven. 'Did you not hear what I said? She shall not cross the threshold whilst I am in the house and have servants at my command! And I will not leave this house till I am driven out of it.'

'Then, may we go into the bungalow?'

The widow hesitated. She was angry and flushed.

'It will hardly do to have the interview on the terrace, with the maids at the bedroom windows, and the gardener at the flower-beds, their ears open to catch what is said.'

'Very well; you may go into the bungalow.'

'And, madam, will you come to us there?'

'I! and meet that brazen-faced—that abominable creature? I! a clergyman's daughter! Never! never! I am Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven. Let my father see her, and settle as he sees fit. I leave all in his hands, only don't let him ask me to see her, for—I won't.'

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. CURGENVEN, NUMBER ONE.

Mr. Physic went to the hired conveyance which he had left at the entrance to the house. The driver stood by his horse, with stolid face, brushing away the flies that assembled on the flanks and between the eyes of the brute, and addressed it sometimes in terms of flattery and endearment, then in those of obloquy and dislike.

Theresa was inside the cab. She had not dismounted, as the agent had requested her to remain seated till his return, and she had plenty of matter to occupy her brain during his absence.

The position of affairs relative to Curgenven had been explained to her by Physic during the drive. She had a clear head, and she understood it.

Captain Lambert had made his will shortly after his accession to the property, and then, knowing he was married and separated from his wife, and with no prospect before him of becoming a father, he had bequeathed everything to his Cousin Percival for life, and then to Percival's son Justinian. When, however, a few years later, he married the rector's daughter, a settlement had been drawn up whereby the estates were to descend to the children of Lambert, lawfully begotten, by his proposed wife Jane, daughter of the Reverend James Pamphlet, subject to a charge of three hundred pounds per annum to be paid to the widow after the coming of age of his eldest son, should he have one, or after the marriage of his daughter, should he have no son.

Now as this marriage was invalid, so was the contract; consequently the previous will came into force. But Mr. Percival had up to this time been given no intimation of this. It was advisable that he should not be informed till the Pamphlet family had been consulted. What Mr. Physic proposed was that Mr. Percival should be told the circumstances in a day or two, and that he should take possession of Curgenven, the settlement being privately withdrawn. No one then need know of the scandal, that is to say, if the first Mrs. Curgenven could be persuaded to hold her tongue.

Mr. Physic had thrown out intimations to Theresa on the drive that if she left her interests in his hands, made a friend of him, he would secure for her some pickings. He would make the Pamphlets 'stump up' and the Curgenvens 'fork out,' so that she need not be solicitous about her future.

But to have one or other party forced to 'stump up,' 'to fork out,' or, to use another of the agent's terms, 'shell out,' through fear of her speaking openly of her affairs was not pleasant to Theresa. She was proud. Her pride had kept her separate from her husband all these years, and though some of it had broken down under privation and weakness, so that she had come to her husband to entreat help, that was a different matter from selling her secret to Mr. Percival to help him into Curgenven, and her silence to Mrs. Curgenven to save her pride from a fall. It was repugnant to her to make merchandise of her unhappy past, but that she should entertain such a feeling did not occur to the agent, who was elated at having an opportunity in his hands of playing off one party against another, and of paying off old grudges.

Mr. Physic's manner had been familiarly offensive, and Theresa had been obliged to treat him with coldness, feeling that the least relaxation on her part might lead to unpleasantness. She resolved on no account to return to Liskeard in the carriage with him, she would either walk back, or, if she went in the cab, require him to sit outside with the driver.

He had hinted something about hunting in couples, about putting their horses together. Theresa's life had not been a smooth one, but one of the principal ruffles in it had been occasioned by the attentions—sometimes serious, sometimes flippant, sometimes honourable, and sometimes not—of men who had been attracted by her good looks when younger than she was now; and nothing in her tossed career had caused her greater annoyance, more heart-aches and humiliations, than these same attentions. She was weary—weary to death of contest with adverse circumstances, craving for rest as age approached. Whether her personal charms, or the prospect of using her as his tool, had aroused interest in her in this man Physic, she did not care to ask; she resolved to shake herself free from him, and to act independently. She wished to see and speak with Mrs. Curgenven, if possible, alone.

She was still deep in thought when Physic put his terrier-like head in at the cab-window, and said, 'She has her feathers up—the cockatoo. She won't meet you, not she. But get out and come to the bungalow; the old daddy is to be summoned. He's Master Pomposity I can tell you.' Then, turning to the driver, he said, 'You, James, go round to the stables, and make the groom give you a feed. We shall be here another hour, and thank the stars if we get away then.'

He threw open the carriage door and held his hand to assist Theresa to descend. She disregarded his hand, and alighted without aid.

'I particularly desire to see Mrs. Curgenven,' she said, and took a step towards the front door.

'No use. She refuses an interview. Now, look here; don't you put your oar in. If you do, you will upset the boat. Leave all to me, and trust your interests in my hands. They are safe there, safe as my own. I'll see that you get some snips off the cloth. The whole affair needs delicate and experienced handling. Let me alone; trust all to me, and you shall have no reason to complain. Two parties will be under lasting obligation to you, and I'll see to it that this obligation is cashable. There, what more could I do? Come along with me to the bungalow, I have the key.'

Theresa followed Mr. Physic reluctantly across the terrace to the bungalow. He put the key into the door, and let her in.

'There, my dear,' said he, 'to the right is the smoking-room. I'll go after the venerable fossil. Make yourself comfortable and wait for us.'

Theresa entered, seated herself in an easy-chair, and listened to the retreating steps of the agent.

The rectory was distant by road half-a-mile, it adjoined the park, the church was in the grounds of Curgenven. In ancient times the priest lived in the manor-house, was chaplain there, and tutor to the children; thus, in a good number of cases, the parish church is close to the manor-house. After the Reformation the parsons sought out domiciles for themselves, their wives and familes, and built on the most suitable bit of glebe, consequently many a parsonage is far from the church. At Curgenven there was a short cut, a footpath from the rectory that opened into the churchyard by a locked wicket. The day was warm, bees were buzzing in the window, struggling against the glass to get out. They must have come down the chimney, by no other means could they have got into the bungalow. On the window-sill was a tortoiseshell butterfly that was dying. It had battered its wings in striving to penetrate the glass, as the bees were now doing, till its powers failed or its heart was broken, and then it fell down, and was winnowing slowly with its bruised wings, like the rhythmical movement of lungs breathing, but this was the spasm of approaching death. In the corner of the window a spider had constructed a cobweb with a fibrous tunnel down which he lived, and from which he rushed when a fly was entangled, and drew it into his cave, but when a bee was caught in the mesh he remained quiescent, and suffered the bee to disentangle himself unmolested.

Through the window shone a copper-beech blazing in the sun. No ray of sunlight entered the room, for the window faced the north, but the copper-beech so blazed that it sent a reflected glow through the little room.

Above the copper-beech soared Scotch pines, spreading into flaky boughs, which were laden with rooks' nests. No rooks were wheeling and curving about them now, for the nesting-time was over, and the birds, having long ago reared their young, had gone off to the seaside or the moors for change of scene and air and diet.

Theresa remained in the chair for some time, with the thoughts within her tossing in fitful, disordered fashion, like the waves on an ironbound coast that are broken into confusion of coil and recoil. The pain from her mending collar-bone, the weariness of the arm bound in one position, had produced a slight fever in her blood, that momentarily confused her thoughts. She looked about the little room. In this, Captain Curgenven had lounged reading the papers, smoking his pipe or cigar, had written his letters, and planned his mechanical contrivances. His waste-paper basket was beneath the table, full to overflow with envelopes and old circulars of wines, and damp-resisting paints, and iron-fencing, and lawn-mowers; on the table were compass and rule, some books, a *Stone's Justices' Manual*, for Captain Lambert had been a magistrate, and a notice from the petty sessional clerk of the cases that were to come before the bench next magistrates' meeting, which happened to be the day of Captain Lambert Curgenven's funeral. Against the walls were a picture of a ship—the vessel to which he had been appointed in the Pacific—and a rack of guns and fishing-rods. The squire had not been a sporting man himself, but he had allowed his Cousin Percival and Justinian, Percival's son, and any friend who asked leave to shoot and fish over his property.

On the mantelshelf where some Chinese curios, and on the floor a pair of well-worn slippers. Theresa did not notice these latter at first, she was looking dreamily through the window at the rooks' nests, and was thinking how that the birds had their homes to which to come and from which to go, but she had never had one of her own. The birds are born in nests, but she had not been born even in a home. Her father and mother had been wanderers, perhaps gipses. The camp had been in a lane in Hampshire, near the New Forest, when scarlet fever had attacked the adults and the young, and had swept away her father, and mother, and sister; she—the babe—had been left, and had been taken charge of by a kind, good lady, Mrs. Fenton, who lived in a pleasant cottage on the outskirts of the forest. She had been adopted and brought up by Mrs. Fenton, and had been with her till that lady's death at Naples. The rooks were better off than she. Year by year they came back to the same Scotch pines at Curgenven. That spider was better off than she, for he could build himself a home, spin himself a habitation out of his own bowels. Theresa might have recalled the words of Ralph in Beaumont and Fletcher's old play of the *Knight of the Burning Pestle:* 'To a resolved mind, his home is everywhere.' She had acted on this principle for nineteen years, and it had failed. She was dead-weary of a wandering, an uncertain life. Several times she had received offers of marriage, and might have made herself a home in the New World, but she could not forget that she was bound to an indifferent man, and he stood in the way of her finding a new home. Now, youth was over, her powers had failed, her energies were exhausted, and she longed for rest and security. It was not to be had. She saw how the bees were hammering at the glass to escape. They sought freedom that they might speed directly homeward. They had hives, where they stored their honey and where they could sleep the winter. They were a thousand times happier than she.

The poor butterfly that lay on the table had no home. Her dreamy eyes rested on it, and, as her bosom rose and fell, it kept rhyme with the expansion and contraction of the battered wings of the dying insect.

All at once an idea shot like an electric bolt through the heart of Theresa. She remembered that it was in the bungalow that Captain Curgenven had destroyed himself. The spasm was followed by a sense of numbness, a horror that she should be on the spot where he had died. Unwillingly, her eyes sank to the floor, searching, with fear quivering in every vein, lest she should there see the stain of his blood. She breathed more freely when she saw that the floor was carpeted, and that it was certainly not there that he had died.

But his slippers were there—his slippers!

Theresa rested her elbow on the arm of the chair and leaned her throbbing brow in her hand, as her eyes observed those down-trodden slippers of threadbare, stained embroidery.

A sense of bitterness had risen in her heart a moment before at the thought of Lambert, when she considered that he had not only not given her the home she sought, but had stood in the way of her finding one for herself; but now, at the sight of these old slippers, a great wave of pity for the wretched man rose in her heart, and rolled over its surface and washed out all the writing there scored against him. He had been hard pressed for money at Malta; he had not known where to turn for it. She had made no allowances for that, and the irritation consequent thereon. Since then she had experienced repeatedly what it was to be in the last straits for money, and she felt that she could forgive Lambert a great deal—if not all—the sorrow and ruin he had brought on her life. There had been mistakes and misunderstandings on both sides—carelessness on his, resentment on hers. The tears fringed her long lashes.

'I wonder—I do wonder,' she thought, 'whether he ever did think of me, and had any love at all for me?'

She stood up.

It was strange how that then, in the midst of her own anguish of mind, she could consider the suffering butterfly, but it was so. It seemed to her—but it may have been consequent on the fever in her blood troubling her mind—that the pain of the despairing, dying tortoiseshell butterfly was the one thing superadded to her own pain that she could not endure. She moved to the table, acting consciously after a fashion and unconsciously after a fashion, and took the sheet of notices for the Petty Sessions and passed the paper under the dying insect.

As she did this, she discovered the surface of a writing-desk of olive-wood inlaid with little Neapolitan figures, on which the sheet had lain.

In an instant she remembered it, and forgot the butterfly. This was Lambert's old desk that he had had at the time when they were married. There was the little fisherman on it with the red cap, and there the woman with the olive-green gown.

She remembered distinctly how Lambert and she had laughed to find that one of her keys opened his desk. She had that same key on her bunch in her pocket now. Should she open his desk? Why not? Who had a greater right to do so than herself, his true wife? And she longed to discover whether in that old desk there were any letters of hers treasured up, a lock of her hair, the little miniature of her done at Naples. She had no difficulty in unlocking the desk. She raised the lid and looked in. There were papers there. She turned them over with the fingers of the one hand she was able to use.

No, not a letter, not a lock—but stay!—there was, she remembered, a secret drawer. The ink-pot must be taken out, and the side of the little compartment that held it raised, then that freed the secret drawer. She removed the glass ink-pot, and speedily succeeded in opening the drawer. There was the miniature, there the lock of hair, and something as well—a long envelope, sealed with the Curgenven arms, inscribed, in large letters:

'*My Will.*
'*To be opened only by Mr. Physic, and used by him in certain contingencies.*
'*Lambert Curgenven.*
October 3, 18—.'

What was to be done?

At that moment she heard steps and voices approaching. Mr. Physic and the rector were arriving.

She hastily slipped the paper into her pocket, closed the secret drawer, replaced the ink-pot, relocked the desk, and sank, panting and flushed, into the arm-chair as the door opened and the two gentlemen entered.

The butterfly was still. Its spasmodic wavings of the wings were at an end. It was dead.

CHAPTER X.

THE REVEREND JAMES PAMPHLET.

The Reverend James Pamphlet's face was of the colour of grey granite as he walked from the rectory to the Manor beside Mr. Physic and heard his story.

'Merciful powers!' he exclaimed. 'What will people say?'

He passed his fingers through his white whiskers and drew them out to their full extent.

Unlike his daughter, he accepted the story at once, and was cowed at the prospect of its becoming public.

'Can nothing be done to hush up this unfortunate affair?'

'Everything,' answered Mr. Physic cheerily. 'But Mrs. Curgenven—I mean Number Two—is quite inflexible. She will not see Number One, will not enter into communication with her, and persists that she is an impostor, or has concocted this story in order to extort money. Money, naturally, it will cost to hush up the facts, and facts they are. I don't know that it is of any particular interest to any one to conceal the facts except yourself and Mrs. Curgenven, your daughter. That they can be kept under a dish-cover without some payment is not probable. Number One is impecunious, Number One has been in America, Number One is not a fool by any means, and when you tott these items together, why—it means money. I believe there is a proverb that "speech is silver, but silence golden."'

The Reverend Mr. Pamphlet felt his gorge rise, as though he were in a rough sea.

'What do you think, now, at the outside, it will cost?' he asked in a faint voice, much like that with which on board ship he would have said, 'Steward, a basin, please.'

'You leave the matter to me. I am a man of business. I have my wits at my finger and toe ends, and a double portion in the tip of my nose. I'll do all I can for you. Put your interests unreservedly into my hands, and I'll do what I can to abate her demands. I tell you what we'll do. We'll get her shipped off to the States again. Reckon on me. I'm heart and soul for you.'

'You see,' said the rector in a tremulous voice, as he took his whiskers with both hands and drew them out to stiffen them, conscious that his limpness of spirit had invaded his whiskers and had made them droop, 'you see, between ourselves, I am in almost daily expectation of advancement, a canonry, or an archdeaconry, or something of the sort; and if this dreadful affair were to get wind, the bishop might hesitate—might pass me over for a very inferior man, a man, I mean, who cannot put in such claims as myself. You see, my dear Physic, the bishop can't afford to select men for posts of importance if they are not safe every way—safe to have no definite convictions, safe to have nothing awkward in their past, and safe not to go off like rockets in the future. They must select men, you understand, of no marked individuality.'

'I quite understand,' said Physic, 'men in the realm of man, what whiting are among fishes, and Jerusalem artichokes among vegetables, and sago in the pudding realm.'

'I wouldn't put it quite in that way,' said Mr. Pamphlet. 'But—to the point under consideration. What is to be done? I must see this person, of course, and if the story be true, as I suppose it is——'

'About that no doubt at all. I have not the evidence in my hands yet, but I have written to the Embassy at Naples for it, and I may tell you, I've known about it for some time. I knew before the captain married your daughter.'

'Then why did you not inform me? I would not have permitted the marriage.'

'The captain was convinced that his first missus was dead. He spent a hundred pounds in inquiries without coming on a trace of her. The fact is, we went the wrong way to work.'

'How so?'

'The captain was certain she had run away with a Marchese Gioberti who had paid her attentions, and we expended that hundred pounds in tracking the Marchese. But the scent led to earth. He was dead, and none of his relatives would say anything about the lady. Perhaps he had kept it from them; perhaps they did not choose, when he was dead, to say anything about his love-affairs, so we concluded. It never occurred to the captain nor to me that, instead of running away *with* the Marchese, she had run away *from* him. Consequently, when we were searching in one direction, she was off in another, and we neglected the threads which would really have led us to her. Will you believe it? She left her address with the chaplain! It did not for one moment enter into the head of the captain to ask a parson as to her whereabouts.'

'Ah!' said the rector, 'that was fatal.'

'Of course it was fatal. It led us all wrong.'

'It is a dreadful business,' groaned Mr. Pamphlet. 'It must be hushed up—even if it cost money. I am not a rich man. Indeed, I may say I am a poor man.'

'But you will spare what is necessary?'

'I must do what I must,' said the rector, his face and hands becoming bathed with cold perspiration. 'Oh, that I should have come to this! Oh, that Jane had never been born! She had measles when young—about thirteen—and pulled through, and I was so glad then. Oh dear! how little we know what is best for us! And now she will cost me a great deal of money, and may prevent my becoming an archdeacon! Oh dear! oh dear!' moaned Mr. Pamphlet, 'and I have teetotalled under the bishop—just to please him—and been so zealous on the platform against moderate drinkers, and I have denied myself my glass of port—and all for nothing.' He was on the verge of tears. He put one hand over the other and rubbed the back, driving his fingers up the cuffs, with low sighs and moans to himself, forgetful for a moment of the presence of Mr. Physic, so overcome was he at the thought of his reputation receiving a blight, or of his pocket being emptied to save his reputation—or rather the reputation of his daughter.

On reaching the bungalow door, he hung back, and allowed Physic to open and stand waiting for him to pass through. He pulled out a white pocket-handkerchief and mopped his brow, then plucked the agent's sleeve, and said, in a low tone, 'Don't you think it would be better for me not to go in and see her? Should any talk arise, should there be any question hereafter, I might be able to say that I had had nothing to do with it, that I had not seen the person, and had not entered into communication with her.'

'That is as you like, sir. If you will leave it in my hands, and trust me——'

'And yet—it might cost me more than I can possibly afford. Bless me! I never was so placed in my life before!'

The fact was that Mr. Pamphlet had not absolute trust in the sincerity and disinterestedness of the agent. He had heard enough from his daughter to make him mistrust his straightforwardness, and he thought, for his pocket's sake, it would be advisable that he should be present when a bargain was struck; whereas for the sake of his reputation it were preferable that the bargain should be struck whilst he was looking at the landscape, scanning the clouds, listening to the voice of the thrushes, and meditating on some sublime passage in the Hebrew poets.

'Really, my daughter is the proper person to enter into this negotiation. It concerns her a great deal more than it does me. I dare say you would not mind coming with me to the house, and helping me to induce her to take the conduct of this affair into her own hands.'

'She will not come,' said Physic; 'I've done my best.'

Mr. Pamphlet laid hold of his whiskers, and not only pulled the white hairs out as far as they could go, but pulled the cheeks out also in which the whiskers were rooted.

'If you like, I'll take everything into my hands,' said Physic. 'I'll be glad to do so. I'm a man of business and you are not. You, you know, sail about in the high atmosphere of theology, and don't often come down to the low levels of common life.'

'But this is *not* common life by any means. It is quite *un*common,' said Mr. Pamphlet in a tone of distress. He did not like the eagerness of the agent to conduct the affair without him.

'After all,' said he, tremulously, 'I suppose it is absolutely necessary that an interview should take place. Is there any one within sight? You'll not say a word about this, now, will you?'

'Not a soul of a word. Come along, sir.'

The agent preceded the rector, whose white collar adhered to his throat, so moist had the latter become.

The delay at the door had allowed Theresa time to recover her composure. When the two men entered, she put her sole available hand to the arm of the chair and attempted to rise, but the rector bowed stiffly and waved to her to remain seated.

'I—I—ahem,' began Mr. Pamphlet, and got no further. Physic at once flew to his relief. Strutting first to this side and then to the other of the rector, very much like a showman exhibiting a five-legged sheep, or a dealer disposing of a spavined horse, he pointed to Mr. Pamphlet and entered into a glowing account of his qualities. 'See, ma'am, this is the gentleman, the father of the lady whom Captain Curgenven married. He's a rural dean, he is, and rector of this parish, and a perfect model, ma'am, of what a clergyman of the Established Church ought to be; and I wish with all my heart there were more like him. Why, ma'am, the curate who comes to this gentleman is as certain of getting a living as Mr. Pamphlet's waistcoat is of stretching down into an apron, and his hat of curling up at the side and developing a rosette in the middle. Now, you see, to one of his persuasion, in which respectability is all, the situation in which he is now placed is dreadful—is appalling. If his daughter is not Mrs. Curgenven, what is she? No organizing will carry him into a prebendal stall or an episcopal throne with such a scandal as that in his family. You see how overcome he is at the very thought! He is quite pale. He can't even speak—he's all of a quiver.'

'No, no! now, come!' said the rector, in nervous protest.

'Yes, but he is, though,' proceeded Mr. Physic. 'Well, now to the point. You see, my dear madam, we are all of one mind; we all think just the same: that this had better be hushed up. We don't want to blaze this unfortunate matter about, and heap shame on the grave of Captain Curgenven, and cut away the pinion feathers on which the reverend gentleman is soaring, and blight the respectable name of that worthy lady whom Captain Curgenven so reprehensibly made his wife, without even telling her that he couldn't do it properly.'

'I have no desire to cause pain and humiliation to any one,' said Theresa quietly, rising from her chair, and facing the rector. 'For nineteen years I and my husband were separated. He never inquired after me, and I never held any communication with him. Our marriage was a mistake. I went into it as a child of sixteen—urged to it—not knowing what I was doing; really driven into it, having no other course open to me. I speedily regretted it. Lambert never cared for me except with a passing fancy. I would not have come here to find him out, but that I was driven to do so by necessity. I came, not to ask him to receive me to himself, but to help me to keep away from him.'

'Exactly,' said Physic, 'a little money. We all want that, and go for it where we know we can get it. You were perfectly right. He had four thousand a year, and certainly out of that four thousand was bound to furnish you with enough to live upon. The only wonder is that you did not come sooner.'

'I was earning my livelihood.'

'And, perhaps, did not know that the captain was well off.'

'I did not know that. That I discovered quite accidentally.'

'Well, we won't go into that matter now, it is not to the point. Money you wanted,' said Physic. 'For money you came to Curgenven, and there you discovered things were not quite what you expected. Unhappily, your appearance so startled the captain that—well, it was an accident, we know—his hand shook, and he was shot. I suppose it is money still that you want? You haven't come into a fortune since you arrived here, have you?'

'I wish to observe,' said Mr. Pamphlet in a trembling voice, whilst he deprecatingly waved his hand, 'that my living is not good, and it is saddled with a heavy charge to Queen Anne's Bounty. I am obliged, owing to the elaboration of my organization, to keep the curate, a mission woman, and a Scripture reader. The costs are very great, so that I am in fact a poor, a very poor man. I do most sincerely desire to hush up this dreadful scandal, but my means will not allow me to be lavish. If fifty pounds, or, at the very outside, a hun—I mean seventy-five, could induce you——'

'Allow me to interrupt you,' said Theresa, with haughtiness. 'You entirely misconceive why I am here. I wished to see your daughter, and speak face to face with her. She refuses me that courtesy. I am sorry. We could then have done without the intervention of Mr. Physic.'

'I assure you, ma'am, the whole matter has been placed in my hands,' said the agent.

'Not by me! I refuse to permit your interference, as far as I am concerned; and as far as I can understand, the only person in the whole affair who holds the key is myself. I am Mrs. Curgenven, and was the lawful, the only lawful wife of the late Captain Curgenven. But, for nineteen years I have contented myself with the name of Mrs. Lambert, or, in professional circles, of Signora Lamberta. I shall be quite willing to remain under that designation for the future. I have not, for nineteen years, talked of my troubles and the wrongs done me, and I have no intention of talking of them now, after he who wronged me and occasioned all my sorrows is no more.'

'I am so thankful, so thankful to hear you say so,' gasped the rector.

'Not only so, but Mr. Physic entirely misunderstands me if he thinks that I am one to sell my silence. So long as the property goes as it was willed, I am content. I will say nothing of the past to any one, nor ask you for one farthing in payment for my silence.'

'Oh, what a Christian! what a true Christian!' said the rector, pulling out his whiskers, till they stood on end as if electrified.

'I do ask one thing, but that is not money. It is a fact that I am destitute—absolutely destitute. I can earn my livelihood if put in the way to do so. Recommend me, help me to some place where I can be a companion to a lady, or a governess to elder girls, and I will trouble you no more. I am a good linguist, have been well educated, can play and sing.'

'I will do everything I can,' said Mr. Pamphlet with enthusiasm. 'Why, bless me, there is my daughter, Mrs. Boxholder, wants this, and wrote to me only the other day. I'll recommend you to her at once.'

'Papa, you shall do nothing of the sort!' Mrs Curgenven burst in. Finding that her father had gone to the bungalow, she had so far relented from her former resolution as to follow, that she might hear what went on.

'Papa, you shall do nothing of the sort! How can you! There are Rose and Flora to be considered. And you would introduce a person—a person—lost to all sense of decency, an impostor?'

'Oh, my dear, she is such a Christian! such an excellent Christian! and' (*aside*) 'it will save us some hundreds of pounds.'

Mr. Physic, his beady eyes glittering with anger, brushed up against Theresa, and said aside, 'You fool—you double fool!'

CHAPTER XI.

CROWNS OF SILVER AND GOLD.

Alice Curgenven was a fair-haired girl with brilliantly blue eyes. She had been wandering in the grounds till she tired of the familiar shrubs and trees, and then strayed through the wicket-gate that led out on the moor.

Curgenven stood on the slope of moorland that rose into bold granite tors. It occupied a depression down which ran a crystal stream, brawling over rocks, bespraying banks of moss and dense coppices of fern. The *osmunda regalis* luxuriated here; old oaks leaned over the rift formed by the brook, clothed in the thickest pile velvet of silvery moss shot with green. In every depression of the land the trees grew to good size, but when they endeavoured to top a shoulder of hill they were caught and twisted by the winds.

Alice was not permitted to go by herself unaccompanied into the village, or along the roads, but was allowed to run on the moor within well-understood limits. On the moor she could come by no harm; there was free innocent nature, wilderness ranged over by sheep, but infrequently trodden by the feet of men.

In the fresh air, laden with the scent of thyme and gorse, Alice rambled on till she came to boggy land, where grew the cotton-grass in profusion. Then she seated herself on a stone, and, after having picked the silver-tufted grass, amused herself with twining the heads into a wreath, which she intended next Sunday to lay on her father's grave.

Whilst thus engaged she heard a slight noise, and looking in the direction whence it came, saw a red head rise above a mass of granite.

Alice uttered a slight exclamation of alarm, and sprang to her feet, throwing down the silver-tipped grass and the half-finished garland.

'Why do you cry out?' asked a girl of her own age who emerged from behind the rocks. 'I am not a pixy. Don't you know me? I am Esther Morideg.'

'Why did you come on me in such a way, Esther? You frightened me.'

'I came to see what you were doing, miss; I be come to have a talk with y'.'

'I wished to be alone,' said Alice.

'Oh! you turned me out of the park, or your mother did, the other day. I might not eat and play there with the rest. I might not look at your pretty flowers and fine trees. I was driven away as a dog is turned out o' church, and now you want to be a queen and have all the moor to yourself too. But you shan't. The park and the fields belong to you, and the down to me. You shan't drive me out o' my kingdom as you drove me out o' yourn.'

'I am very sorry, Esther; I do not want to drive you away. I ask your leave, as you are queen here, to stay in your land.'

'Oh, it don't belong to me. It belongs to nobody but God or the devil, and the pixies. But I belong to it, and so I come to think o' the wild land as mine. I tell y' I've been watching you ever so long. Do y' see that old heap o' stones there? Well, in these old carns there's mostly a chamber, walls, and roof, and all o' great granite stones. Some folks ha' broke into thickey (yonder) carn sarching for gold, and made a hole; and when I want to be out o' the cold wind, or the sun be too hot, and I'd like a sleep, why then I creep in there, and lie there by hours and hours, so as——'

'Are you not afraid?'

'Feared o' what? I reckon it 'ud take a deal to fear me.'

'Afraid of the pixies?' *

'Them pixies won't hurt me, bless y', I belong to they.'

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* In Cornwall pronounced *pisgies.*

Alice picked up the fallen cotton-grass.

'There now,' said Esther, coming out from the pile of rocks.

'See! I were i' thickey old carn, and when I looked out o' the hole, I saw you was busy making a silver crown. Then I came crawling down, wriggling all flat on the turf like a long cripple (viper) till I came to the stones, and then I hid and looked at y'. You didn't see I. I can go like a pixy anywhere and anyhow. But look now to this. You was wearin' a crown o' silver, and me a makin' o' one o' red gowld. Look now!'

Esther came forward. She was a contrast to Alice in every way. The latter was a delicate, refined child, with hair almost as pale as the cotton-grass; her complexion was clear, white and pink, and her eyes blue as the speedwell. Esther was somewhat taller, firmly knit, finely moulded, full of physical strength. Her face was tanned with exposure, and she had red hair and hazel eyes. Her clothes were coarse, but not ragged and shabby. Her frock was short, exposing her sturdy limbs encased in thick home-knitted stockings. Her hair was uncombed, in a tangle, and as she came forward she placed a crown of yellow furze upon it. Her eyes were quick, sparkling.

'See my crown!' exclaimed Esther. 'You know what folks sing—

Golden furze i' bloom! Golden furze i' bloom!
When the furze be out o' flower,
Then love be out o' tune.'

She came beside Alice and seated herself on the same block of granite.

'See! mine is of gold and sweet as honey. Yours be o' silver. Yours is but for the month o' June, but the gou'den furze blooms all the year.'

Then putting her hands to her sides, she began to skip and dance, shaking her red hair and the furze crown that surmounted it, singing—

'There bain't a cloud a-sailing by
That doth not hold a shower;
There bain't a furze-bush on the moor
That do not put forth flower.
About the roots we need not delve,
The branches need not prune,
The yellow furze will ever flower,
And ever love's in tune.'

'It is silly singing that,' said Alice; 'what do you or I know about love?'

'But we shall,' retorted Esther. 'You will marry a great man, with carriages and horses, and red jacket, that goes after the hounds, and I——'

'And who will you marry?'

'I don't know,' said Esther, suddenly becoming grave. 'Perhaps a pixy will carry me away—like my mother.'

'What do you mean?' asked Alice.

The moor-girl shrugged her shoulders. 'I can't tell you all.'

Then Alice noticed that a trickle of red blood was running down the girl's brow, and she exclaimed, 'Oh, Esther! your forehead is bleeding.'

'Look at my fingers,' said Esther roughly; 'one can't weave oneself a gou'den crown wi'out blood, I reckon.'

'Then I'd do without one.'

'It don't become the likes of you,' said the red-haired girl. 'Us be made of different stuff. God Almighty He took a bit o' peat and granite grit, and worked 'em together i' His hands, and chucked what He had made out on the moor, and said, "Run along, Esther, that be you!" That's why nobody can't make a scholard o' me. They've a-tried it, and they canna do it.'

She flung herself on the turf full length, cast off her crown, put her arms behind her red head, drew up her knees, planting her feet deep in the bog among the nodding silver cotton-grass, and muttered, half to Alice, half to herself—'No crown for such as I. I'm good for naught but to run wild on the moors and scramble up the tors. Gran'fer says so. The pixies says so. The school-master says so. And the lady turned me out o' being wi' the other childer, and the beautiful garden and park, 'cos for sartain I don't belong to it, and never nobody can make a scholard o' me, I be a reg'lar good-for-naught.'

'No one is good for naught,' said Alice, 'and surely if you would try you might learn. You come to school so irregularly, that you cannot expect to be a scholar.'

'All the time I be on a bench at school I be on thorns; I'd rather far be rolling i' a furze-break, I would. You may cut my hands off, but I'll never larn them to fashion letters.' She pointed at a whinchat swaying itself aloft above the heather bushes. 'Look to thickey bird there. Would her live i' a cage, dost y' think? No; I reckon her'd die. So would I if I went into the ploughed land and gurt houses. I were born on the moor, and I'll never leave 'n.' She was silent a moment, considering. 'I hope folks 'll never, when I'm dead, take me down and stick me in the ground in the churchyard. One time I clim' up a tor, and there on top I found the bones o' a dead sheep. Her'd climbed up there, and as her couldn't come down again, there her'd died, and there her went away to bones and dust. I'd like that, I would.'

'I can't think how you can like to be on the moor, away from all the houses and the people. It must be very lonely.'

'I reckon the pixies didn't think that when they swarmed away from the hedging, and ploughing, and planting, and enclosing down below. The pixies couldn't bide in the land wi' the folks, so they comed up here. And here they be everywhere. Up to Kilmar I've a-been a' Sunday, and heard their church bells ring.'

'How can you tell such falsehoods, Esther?'

'It be true. And I've seed 'em dance o' a night. Hark! there goes a carriage from your door down the drive.'

'Mr. Physic has been at our house, but I can hear nothing. You must have sharp ears.'

'Aye! and sharp eyes too. One needs both on the moor.'

'Well, I must go home, I cannot stay.'

'I'm not keeping you,' said Esther. And when Alice was gone, she remained, lying on her back in the sun, looking up into the blue sky, the fresh scented air wafting over her, now carrying some of her red locks over her face, then blowing them back again.

She drew her feet out of the peat-water, and put them on the heated rock to dry, and leaned her elbow on the turf, speckled with blue, white, and pink milkwort, and looked into the cloudless sky.

'Lor!' said she, 'that up yonder—God's home—be for all the world like the moor. Not a hedge across it, not an acre on it tilled. No turnips, no pertaties, only stars. No folks—only angels, and they don't know their letters. They be wild as hatter-flights (jack-snipe) I reckon.'

Then she sang with full lungs—

'There bain't a season of the year,
Nor weather hot nor cold,
In windy spring, in watery fall,
But furze be clad in gold.
Her blossoms in the falling snow,
Her blazes bright i' June,
And love, like it, be ever here,
And ever love's in tune.'

Then she noticed that Alice had left her crown of cotton-grass on the turf. Esther took it up and tried it on, then threw it away and replaced her own of furze.

'Nay,' said she, 'I reckon, though hers be free o' prickles, I'd rather wear one o' gowld.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE DAUGHTER OF THE PIXIES.

The evening sun fell slanting over her face, and lit a fire in the tangled hair of Esther. She had gone off into a day-dream, looking into the sky, and catching at the white moths that flickered over her.

At length she sat up. To the east the land fell away to rolling ground and valleys full of rich fertility, but in every other direction was tossed-up moor, and here and there a pile of granite.

She rose and took her way to a dip in the waste beneath a pile of rocks lower down the hill-side. Here a brook, whose cradle was among the granite masses above, having gathered body, came dancing down in a tiny cascade over a shelf; and here was a small cottage, hidden behind enclosure walls of stones piled up, their interstices plugged with turf, and their faces draped with white and pink stonecrop. A paddock and a potato-field lay near the house, and there was also a shed that was formed on the principle of taking advantage of such huge stones as lay convenient, so as to economize the labour of building walls. The house was a little superior to the shed. It was low, of one storey, turf covered, with walls six feet thick, the stones bedded in peat, not lime. The floors were formed of ill-fitting slabs of granite, with black soil in the interstices crammed with relics of feasts, bits of bone, and broken crockery, compacted into a sort of cement. The enclosure walls, erected to protect the windows from being blown in by the winter gales, cut off all prospect. The house was apparently very old; it had an almost prehistoric look about it, so rude and weather-beaten was it; but the rudeness of the masonry and the lichening of the stones were no real indications of antiquity in a district where for centuries the same customs had prevailed—where no tool was used to dress the stones taken lichened and moss-grown from the moor, and piled up as taken to form walls. The cottage had been inhabited, as far back as any could remember, by Roger Morideg, a moor-man—that is to say, one whose duty it was to watch the cattle, ponies, and sheep turned out on the moor within his region.

The moor-man lived all his life in the wilderness, rarely associated with others, lived on horseback, and the cob he rode would go anywhere, climb rocks, plunge through torrents, and thread the intricacies of a bog.

Roger Morideg's wife was a woman born and bred on the moors, far from church and school, accustomed from infancy to solitude, never going into a town even on market days, and perfectly content to be outside the pale of civilization.

Roger and Tamsin had possessed but one child—a daughter; and as they could not afford to keep her at home doing nothing, when she was grown into a strapping woman she was sent into service in Liskeard. But the girl could not endure the cramped life in a town, and the loss of independence in domestic service. She ran away from her mistress, and was afraid to return to her father. For a twelvemonth she was not heard of. Then she did reappear at the cottage, and died there, leaving to the care of Roger and his wife a little grandchild—a daughter—whose birth cost the mother her life.

'That is what comes o' sending a maid to town,' said old Roger. 'Dang me if ever Esther leaves the moor.'

Tamsin Morideg was much by herself; her husband spent the major part of his time from home. He wandered over the moor, carrying food with him strapped to his saddle, and slept not infrequently in holes among the rocks, wrapped in his cloak, whilst his faithful cob browsed on the short grass near, ready to come to him at a call in the morning. Tamsin had married young. She saw little of her kind; the neighbours were very distant in regard to situation and quite as much so in conduct. The nearest houses were small farms on the edge of the moor, and the yeomen's wives in them looked down on the wife of a moor-man, and especially mistrusted her because of her peculiar eyes.

Tamsin had had several children, but all had died in infancy save the mother of Esther. All her love for her lost children was concentrated on this little girl. Esther was to her everything—her ambition, her darling, her trouble, and her joy.

The child grew up, strongly built, healthy, and very unlike the other children of the parish. Her grandfather paid her little attention, he despised women and girls. His own daughter had disappointed him.

As soon as Esther was old enough to understand, the old woman talked to her of her mother, glad to have the child to speak to concerning her, as Roger would not hear her mentioned. Then the child said, 'Gra'ma, who was my father?'

'Do not speak about it,' answered the old woman, looking round her; 'your mother never 'ud tell, but I reckon he wor a pixy. Your mother wor in a place to Liskeard—one day her wor gone. Nobody never knowed whither her'd gone. A year and a day passed, and her comed back wi' you, and her died.'

'But, grannie,' inquired the child, 'has my father never come to see me?'

The old woman shook her head.

'I'm sure I canna say. Once when I wor a-rocking your cradle, and the sun were a-streamin' in at the window, right over you, I seed a shadow come on the bit o' counterpane, and I looked up. There I seed at the window a head wi' thick red hair. The sun were shinin' right through his hair, just for all the world like the fern i' winter.'

'Did he say anything, grannie?'

'No; he looked hard, and then I wor scared lest he'd cast the evil eye on you, and I jumped up to get an axe and turn the edge up to cut the charm. But he wor gone in a jiffy. I never seed 'n again.'

The strange stories of her grandmother made a deep impression on the mind of the child, and her imagination began to spin webs of wonder out of the hints thrown out relative to her mysterious origin.

Esther's sixth birthday was marked by an incident that deeply affected her.

Old Tamsin had made a cake, and the child insisted that it should be eaten by the little fall of the brook. The grandmother agreed, brought milk, and they sat together on a rock near the pool into which the stream plunged, eating the saffron cake, sipping the milk, and talking.

'Grandma,' said the child, 'what be all they great stone heaps on the high places? they be round as a platter, and some have great pieces of rock stuck up on edge about 'em, in a ring like.'

'They be pixy houses,' answered Tamsin.

'What! does my father live in one o' they?'

The old woman hesitated. 'Sure I cannot tell,' was her equivocating reply.

'Have you ever been inside a pixy house?'

'Never.'

'But my mammy lived there a year and a day.'

'Yes, I reckon—for ought I know contrary.'

'I should like to go inside,' said Esther.

'You must never say that again. You must never go near thickey places,' exclaimed the old woman, looking about her uneasily. 'There be no knowing who may hear you, and if they won't fetch y' away for saying of it.'

'Where to?'

'Why, to pixy land, for sure.'

'What be that like?'

Again the grandmother looked uneasily about her. 'This be no place for talking o' the gude volk. Come within.'

'Oh, grannie, let us bide here.'

But the old woman was resolute, and drew her granddaughter after her back to the cottage. Then she told Esther a wonderful story of a little girl who had been enticed into a pixy house, and had seen there a palace standing on red pillars, and beautiful little people who were feasting; and then her guide took her through a door into a country where there was no sun, but for all that, it was full of light, that shone from Cornish diamonds, *i. e.* crystals, set in the roof. There ran rivers of tin, shining like purest silver, and the trees had leaves of copper that tinkled in the wind that blew through the underground world whenever the door into the upper world was opened. And on the bushes, in place of whortle-berries—''urts,' Tamsin called them—grew precious stones.

'What be precious stones, now?' asked Esther.

'Stones of many colours that sparkle and shine.'

'Go on, grandma.'

'Then,' continued the old woman, 'the man brought the little maid back through the door into the chamber as stood on pillars o' red, and gave her a golden cup out o' which to drink, and when her'd a-put 'n to her lips, her fell back vast asleep, sure enough. When her waked, her wor lying outside of one o' thickey stone carns. It wor eventide, so her up and walked home; but when her came in at the door o' her home, all were changed to what it was. Her father wor dead, and her mother grown a poor ou'd woman. Her had a-been lost for twenty years, and the twenty years had gone by wi' her as an hour.'

'I shu'd dear like to see the pixy world and the precious stone 'urts, grannie.'

'But think, Esther; when you came back I might be dead.'

'I reckon I shu'dn't like that.'

'Come,' said the old woman, 'I'll show you some o' the beautiful things your mother had; her had 'em d'rsay from the pixies.'

The child sprang up: 'Oh, do'y, grannie, show them me.'

Tamsin accordingly ascended a broken ladder, to a sort of loft in the roof, followed by Esther. The place was dark, and was a receptacle for rubbish of all kinds. In it was, however, a cypress chest sketched over by a red-hot iron with devices of men and women hunting with hawks and dogs. She dived into the depths, and drew forth a small case, which she put on her knees and opened.

The child crept close to her and looked, marvelling at what was produced—a coral necklace and a pair of Roman pearl ear-drops.

'What be they for?' asked Esther in a whisper.

'Them white things be for the ears. It's o' the likes o' they, so Scriptur saith, the gates o' heaven be made. The chain be for the neck.'

'Oh, grannie, put the chain over me.'

The old woman did so.

'Now, grannie, put on me them ear-things.'

'I canna wi'out boring o' the ears.'

'Then bore them, sure.'

'You'll cry, you will. It will hurt.'

'No, I won't cry. Try me, grannie.

'Then us must go down again,' said the old woman, and she and her grand-daughter scrambled down the laddeɹ' the child wearing the coral necklet, Tamsin holding the ear pendants.

Then Tamsin got a large needle and pierced the little girl's ear-lobes, and let her have the pearl drops to look at during the operation. The child uttered no exclamation of pain.

'Now put them i' my ears, gran'mother.'

Whilst Tamsin was engaged decking out the child with the pearl pendants, suddenly she looked up and uttered a cry—

'He be there! He be looking in at you!' and she pointed to the window.

'Who, grannie?'

But before the old woman could answer, the door opened, and Roger Morideg came in.

'What be you about?' asked the moor-man angrily; 'rigging up the little maid i' them fandangles o' her mother's. You'll be bringing her to the same end, putting follies into her head. Take them things off at once, and put 'em where you found 'em, or I'll e'en take 'em myself and sink 'em deep in ou'd Dozmare pool as has no bottom at all. Never you let the maiden have them again—mind that.'

'Oh, Roger, you gave me a turn, looking in at the window like that.'

Esther stood erect, her head thrown back, her hazel eyes full of pride and pleasure. The great ear-drops hung down and rested on her shoulders. Now and then she cautiously bent her head to look at the coral chain that hung over her bosom.

'Take 'em off!' shouted the grandfather. 'Do you not hear me, Tamsin? Would you have the child go the same road as her mother?'

'Oh, gran'fer! but the pixies gave 'em to my mother.'

'I'll tell y' what,' said old Roger angrily, 'the sort o' pixies as went after your mammy 'll be after you, if you don't give up them things. Never you touch 'em again, or I won't be answerable for you.'

Tamsin Morideg, with trembling fingers, removed the chain and the ear-rings. She was uneasy at what she had done; she really knew nothing of who Esther's father was. To satisfy the child's curiosity, she had invented the fable of the pixy husband, and by repeating it had come to half believe it herself. Her daughter had returned with these ornaments. They were of no real value—sham coral and sham pearl—but they were priceless in the estimation of the ignorant moor-man and his wife.

After this incident, little Esther gave her grandmother no rest. She was continually asking for a sight of the treasures, and her imagination played with the thought of them and of the stores of jewellery in the pixy world underground.

When Esther was eight years old she was sent to Curgenven to school. The way was long, over moor and stream, and it was not a matter of marvel that on rough days she did not appear. But she failed even more frequently on fine days. On these latter the moor was too delightful a playground for her to leave it, the air too pure for her to like to exchange it for that of the National school.

When she was at school she made no friends; she held herself aloof from the other children. They belonged to the narrow, enclosed lowland, and she to the broad and free uplands. They had nothing in common. She did not know their games—'There came three dukes a-riding by,' or 'The Ringdove,' or 'The Robber Knight.' She came from a direction in which were no houses, and had consequently no opportunity of picking up a companion on the way. The other children were unable to amuse themselves when alone, they congregated together for their sports, but Esther was never more able to entertain herself than when alone.

One day, soon after Liskeard fair, the little girls showed each other the pinchbeck rings and the chains of glass beads their mothers had bought for them at the booths. Esther laughed scornfully, and boasted about her gold and pearl and coral treasures, which were to be hers when she was grown up. The children crowded about her to hear of this jewellery, and in her pride she told them that it was pixy treasure from the nether world. From that moment she was regarded with envy by the little girls, and was an object of mockery to the boys. They called her the 'Pixy' and the 'Changeling,' and instituted a persistent persecution of her. Esther was usually able to hold her own, but when surrounded by a throng of boy bullies, she was overmatched, till one day, when greatly tormented, she gasped forth—'Tak' care now! I'll send my pixy father to torment you.' Then the boys broke into a loud guffaw. 'And my grandmother, her shall ill-wish you.' At this latter threat they fell back and slunk away.

Tamsin Morideg, probably on account of her peculiar double-irised eyes, but also because of the solitude of her life, far away from all neighbours, was regarded as a wise woman. People came to her to have their swellings struck (*i. e.* touched), and brought her the kerchiefs of those who had wounded themselves, that she might bless the blood on them and so stay the flow.

They came to her, when racked with rheumatic pains, to inquire who had made clay figures of them, and were sticking pins into them. They came to her when their cows failed to give milk, and when the sheep were 'cawded,' to learn how to break the spell that was on their cattle. Partly because the profession of being a white-witch brought her in gains, but chiefly because she was thoroughly convinced of her own powers, Tamsin Morideg encouraged the popular superstition.

Thus Esther grew up, steeped in belief in the reality of the supernatural world. In this world she lived in imagination, and revelled with delight. The actual world, with the men and women and children in it, was outside the sphere of her thoughts and sympathies. She continued to come to school now and again, in careless fashion, as the caprice took her, or when her grandfather interfered to order her attendance, but she learned nothing when there, her mind was incapable of fixing itself on books and feeding off black-boards.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TURNIPIKES' COTTAGE.

THE Reverend Mr. Pamphlet and his daughter were returning to Curgenven in a gig from Liskeard one afternoon shortly after the funeral. The daughter drove. It was characteristic of the rector that he preferred being driven not only in a gig but in his parish. As pastor he followed his sheep; he led them nowhere, but organized them as they sauntered browsing along. He followed his parishioners very much as, according to Horace, Venus follows her swans, sails along 'vinctis oloribus,' but, unlike Venus, with absolutely no control over his swans, satisfied to let them go their own way, so long as they were linked into some sort of system and sang hymns void of dogma and inflated with vapid sentiment.

The road from Liskeard was very much uphill, and the rectorial trap had proceeded slowly, the rectorial cob not being disposed by constitution, habit, and age to run uphill.

The autumn tints were showing in the woods. The oak coppices had put on chestnut livery. That livery was laced with gold where a beech tree had asserted itself by quicker growth, and the woods were dappled with sombre green where Scotch firs rose above the coppice.

The air was fresh. There had been frost during the night, and now that the sun shone warmly on the trees, the leaves descended in showers of copper and gold.

'I am very much afraid that Jesse will never recover that jam of her ear in the gate,' said Mr. Pamphlet, looking at the off-ear of the grey cob, an ear which hung forward and waggled helplessly, whilst the near ear stood erect. 'A sinew must have been torn. To have one lobe asleep whilst the other is awake spoils the look of the cob, and if I could exchange or sell her I would do so. People might think it hardly consistent with my position to have a horse with any peculiarity about it. Have you heard any remarks made relative to it, Jane?'

'Really, papa, I cannot think of the cob now. Nothing you will say or can say—I am sorry to have to seem disrespectful, but say it I must—nothing will make me alter my opinion relative to that creature.'

'What—the cob? There can be no doubt about it, she got her ear jammed in a gate.'

'I am not speaking about Jesse at all, but about that woman. She is a low, cunning, profligate adventuress.'

'My dear, I think you are hardly justified——'

'Papa, in these matters women are better judges than men. If a woman has a plausible manner, a good pair of eyes, and——'

'Jane, for shame!'

'It is a fact. A clever, unscrupulous woman can completely hoodwink the wisest and best of men; whereas to a sister woman's eyes her cunning and falsity are conspicuous.'

'But you have seen her only once.'

'Once too often. That was enough for me to judge. But the very fact of her daring to make such a claim as to be Mrs. Curgenven stamps her—stamps her—brands her.'

'But, Jane, what if it be true?'

'It can't be true! how can it be? I am Mrs. Curgenven. As for my not being justified in condemning her, I think, with all due deference, papa, that you somewhat surpassed the bounds of that caution which so conspicuously surrounds you, when you recommend her as a governess to the Boxholders. Surely Rose and Flora have precious souls, and to put in association with them, to put over them, at their tender age, a woman of such abandoned character is at least injudicious.'

'I entirely demur to what you say of her. She has been tried and has proved her worthiness.'

'Oh, of course, you stand up for her against your own daughter.'

'No, my dear, I do not stand up for her against you. I am protecting you against yourself. Your obstinacy in refusing to look at the possibility of her story being correct may involve you in disagreeable consequences, and may interfere with my influence for good in reclaiming the evil and confirming the good.'

'I absolutely repudiate the woman's story. I don't mean to deny that Lambert may have done silly and even wrong things when he was a young man; but that he could have married that creature, and then have proposed to and married *me* without a word about his previous union—papa, it is preposterous! Stuff and fiddle-sticks!' She settled herself more firmly and resolutely on her seat. 'I am Mrs. Curgenven, and there is no other—there can be none other, save me.'

'Well, suppose it was as you say, and that Lambert was involved in some cobweb, nature undefined, in his early youth—is it not better that this should be swept away instead of being brought to light?'

'I allow that. *I* don't want to stir up scandal with respect to Lambert. He was, I always knew, and did not mind saying so whilst he was alive—and I don't mind saying so after he is dead—a dear, good, happy-go-lucky fellow, who was easily led into anything. A good woman could lead him aright, and I flatter myself that whilst I had the management of him, he was a regular church-goer, subscriber to all the charities, and even taught in the Sunday school. But what he might have been in other hands, I cannot say.'

'Well, let the past be hidden, it is best so for you and for me. I have written to recommend her to your sister, as I conscientiously can, and that will get rid of her from this neighbourhood. It will take her to Scotland, and it is a matter of supreme consequence to put the greatest tract of country possible between her and this place, between her and you and me.'

'Yes, but that is not all. You are placidly surrendering my three hundred a year and Alice's position of heiress of Curgenven. By accepting this trumped-up story, you ruin Alice's future, and you make Curgenven over to Percival, who is as unfit to be a country squire as is that cob I am driving.'

'The sacrifice is very great, I allow that,' answered the rector, 'but great as it is, nothing short of it will secure you against a terrible exposure and the chance of what I dare not contemplate, so disastrous would it be to my prospects—I mean my moral influence in the parish and in the rural deanery.'

'I do not like—indeed I resent with all my soul—the admission that there may be truth in this cock-and-bull tale. It is such a barefaced attempt to extort money. If I had my way I would prosecute the creature for it.'

'And drag the memory of your deceased husband in the mire?'

Mrs. Curgenven gave an impatient jerk of her head. 'Poor Lambert! no. I suppose one must sacrifice one's own feelings, one's own comfort, to save him that. This is what comes of thoughtlessness. A good-natured scatter-brain is always bringing other people into trouble, and costing them endless contradiction. Well, if it must be! Why, good gracious! There is Mrs. Pike! And not yet churched!' The exclamation and diversion of Mrs. Curgenven's thoughts were caused by the appearance of a couple of riders who dashed past at a gallop.

One was a very small man in tight jacket, and such close-fitting breeches, that one would suppose, having been got into them, it would be impossible for him to extricate himself from them again. The other rider was a young woman with dark ringlets, in a blue cloth habit-skirt. Both were mounted on well-bred young horses.

The male rider touched his cap with the handle of his whip to the rector as he passed.

'Well, I never!' exclaimed Mrs. Curgenven. 'Not two months passed, the babe of course unweaned, and she riding out in that barefaced manner. What are the lower classes coming to!'

'I suppose she is practising the horse, and getting it accustomed to the flapping of a skirt—it is their business.'

'Their business, indeed,' said Mrs. Curgenven; 'it is scandalous that a woman who has not been churched should appear on the high-road in a riding-habit.'

'Of course she ought to have been churched, and the child is not yet baptized.'

'Five children under eight, and the youngest not two months old—and a blue habit too! Upon my word, she must be spoken to; and, papa, as soon as ever we reach the cottage, I will go in and see how the children have been left. Five under eight years, and the youngest not two months old. It is frightful! It is unnatural!'

'And I'll see Pike about the cob. He may manage to exchange her for me. As rural dean I think I ought not to drive a horse the tendons of whose right ear are broken. It might materially damage my moral influence.'

After driving for about a quarter of a mile, Mrs. Curgenven pulled up at an octagonal cottage by the roadside, against a bank and bed of trees. The house had been a turnpike keeper's lodge, but the pike was abandoned, the trust dissolved, and now the cottage was let to a horsebreaker of the name of Pike, who, from his residence, acquired the popular designation of 'Turnipike,' with the epithet of 'Little,' due to his diminutive size.

Mrs. Curgenven knocked at the door, which was shut. She met with no response, but presently heard a scratching sound within, and then the latch clicked, but the door was not opened. Mrs. Curgenven then put her hand on the latch and opened the door, and in so doing nearly upset a child of seven who was trying with a stick to reach and unclasp the latch.

The widow went into the cottage and looked about her; then she came back hastily to the gig and said to her father, 'You may drive on, papa, I cannot in conscience leave these children to run the risk of destruction. One poor little mite had fallen on the hearth, and would certainly have been burnt had not the fire been out, most mercifully. There is another has got hold of a knife, and she might have hacked off her brothers' and sisters' fingers, only, most mercifully, the knife won't cut. There was a pickle-bottle on the table full of milk, and the stem of a tobacco-pipe stuck into it for the baby. I should not in the least be surprised if that careless and unnatural mother had never properly cleaned out the pickle-bottle, and there may be a piece of mustardy cauliflower left in it. Anyhow, the children have knocked or pulled the pickle-bottle over, and the milk is spilled on the floor, and there are three of the little things round the puddle lapping it up with their tongues, like young kittens; and as the floor has not been washed ever since the Pikes came here, there is absolutely no saying what amount of filth, and of what description, they are taking up into their systems along with the milk.'

'Well, jump in, my dear; I'll speak to the mission woman about it.'

'I cannot indeed,' said Mrs. Curgenven. 'If anything were to happen to those poor little mites after what I have seen, I should never have an hour of peace again. I shall remain here and look after them till that unnatural mother returns; then, of course, my responsibility will be at an end.'

'But, my dear Jane, how will you get home?'

'The distance is but a mile and a half. I will walk when Mrs. Pike returns. Never mind me. Drive on, and if you like to send John back for me you may—and yet no, I will walk. Jesse has done quite enough for to-day.'

Mrs. Curgenven was a good-hearted woman, always ready to do a kind thing, but never able to do it in quite a kindly fashion. She would go out of her way to do for another person an act which exhibited extraordinary consideration, and yet leave that person tingling with resentment at the manner in which the obligation was conferred. Not one woman in a score, not one rector's daughter in a hundred, not one squiress in a thousand would have done what she now undertook—to manage a swarm of untidy, dirty babes in a cottage, whilst the mother was away exercising a horse. But it was quite certain that on the return of Mrs. Pike to her home and her babes, Mrs. Curgenven would give her a piece of her mind with such force and asperity that the horsebreaker's wife would like, if she dared, to turn her out of the house.

Mrs. Curgenven waited till her father had driven along the road, and was out of sight, and then she set to work to put the children and the cottage to rights. In the first place, to see that the baby in the cradle had not been smothered, so preternaturally quiet did it seem; then to pick up and remove from the milk-puddle those who were lapping it and the dirt under the milk as its condiment. Next to examine the bottle, and discover that it was broken by its fall. Then Mrs. Curgenven routed about the house in search of a cloth with which to mop up the liquid. She found two or three, one an old stocking, so torn as to be useless; another made out of a waistcoat, but that was steeped in paraffin; and whilst she was examining a third, in doubt whether it were an article of clothing still in use, or one discarded and degraded to be a floorcloth, she was surprised by an exclamation in the doorway of—

'Hallo, Jane! what are you doing here?'

She turned round, and saw Mr. Percival and his boy Justinian, both very dusty and hot, with long bamboo walking-sticks in their hands.

'And what brings you here?' asked Mrs. Curgenven, thinking it easier to throw the burden of answering a question on Mr. Percival, than to explain the reason of her being in the cottage.

'Me! Why, I want Dick — Dicky Turnipike. I want him to look out for a nice cob for Justin and a hunter for me.'

'But I have come from Liskeard and did not overtake you,' said Jane.

'No; the fact is, we walked out to Curgenven, to look about the place. It's an astounding thing, is it not, that I should inherit it? Never dreamed it was possible, but Physic tells me it is to be so, and he ought to know. We were sorry you were out. I took the liberty to ask for lunch, as Justin and I were thunderingly hungry; and we did justice to your cold beef, and all.'

'I am sure you were heartily welcome. You have had a long walk. Why did you not tell James to put the horses into the wagonette and drive you home?'

'It will do us no harm to walk—neither Justinian nor me. I did not like, you know, to make too free.'

'Oh! everything I suppose, by this wonderful shuffle of the cards, is yours.'

'It is a wonderful shuffle,' said Percival. 'I say, young shaver'—this to his son—'you cut along; I walk faster than you, and will catch you up. I want a word with Cousin Jane.'

When the boy, with a pout of dissatisfaction, had gone forward, Mr. Percival turned to Mrs. Curgenven and said, 'It's a rum piece of business altogether, and I don't understand it. Of course, it is all right—Physic says so.'

'It does not in the least follow that it is all right because Mr. Physic says it. If you think so, you believe in him a great deal more than I do.'

'Well,' said Mr. Percival, seating himself on the table, 'I don't mean that altogether; but, of course, he couldn't do anything in the matter unless it were right. How I become legally the inheritor, beats me.'

'And it is enough to beat any one but—there, I will not say what I think. I protest against it morally, though legally I will not contest your succession to Curgenven. It is a most extraordinary affair altogether since that woman has dropped among us all from out of the clouds. No,' said Mrs. Curgenven hotly, 'I won't say that she came from anywhere so near heaven, since she popped up upon us from a direction quite the reverse.'

'What woman?'

'What woman!' repeated Mrs. Curgenven testily. 'If Mr. Physic hasn't told you, why, I do not care to do so. The long and short of the matter is this. That abominable creature——'

'What creature?'

'Oh, you know—she with her hand bound up.'

'The signora!'

'Call her what you will except Mrs. Curgenven. For pity's sake don't call her that. She has the effrontery to say that she was married to Lambert, and that, therefore, his marriage to me was naught. It is one of the grossest attempts at imposition I ever heard of.'

'Whew!' Mr. Percival whistled, and slipped off the table.

'You may well whistle. The story is incredible. It is beyond possibility of belief except by those who are deranged. My father thinks it better to let the will take effect which gives Curgenven to you rather than rake up a foul and disgraceful scandal. I don't agree with him. That woman's proper place is the treadmill. It is conniving at fraud to remain inert However, all the men are against me, and I can't help myself. And there is just this grain of common sense on their side, that, by leaving matters alone, we save the memory of Lambert from being aspersed, and he, dear fellow, is no more here to defend himself. Now you know why you are to be Squire of Curgenven—by sufferance, not by right. Excuse me if I speak with vehemence; a great wrong is permitted—it can't be helped, I suppose—but a great wrong is done to me and my child.'

'Whew!' again whistled Percival, and then began to laugh.

'What are you laughing at?' asked Mrs. Curgenven.

'Excuse me, it is so droll—really, the Signora La Lamberta—good Lord—to be Mrs. Curgenven after all!'

An angry retort from the incensed lady was checked by the dashing up of the Turnipikes to the cottage door.

CHAPTER XIV.

GOLDEN FURZE IN BLOOM.

Justinian Curgenven walked on slowly—sauntered rather than walked, to allow his father speedily to catch him up. He had a long bamboo cane in one hand, as tall as himself, in the other he swung a couple of rabbits.

There was no one visible on the road. On one side the coppice, with a few larger oaks where the soil was not so shallow and the rock not so near the surface as higher up the hill. The valley-bed was marshy, rushes grew in the meadows there, and a stream meandered through the bottom, changing its course after every flood. The hills on the further side rose abruptly, and were but partially clothed in woods; at the summit was dense heather.

Justinian was a handsome boy of nineteen, with large soft brown eyes and dark hair. Any one knowing the family and seeing him lounge along, attracted to one hedge by scarlet vaccinium leaves, then to another to observe a squirrel, or who saw him stand to listen to the wild laugh of the green woodpecker, would have said that he was as desultory and irresolute and thoughtless as his deceased cousin and his father. But such a conclusion would be premature, for he was idling along, killing time with a purpose—awaiting his father, who had promised to catch him up—whereas the two whom he might have been thought to resemble slouched along life without any reason for taking it easy—with, in fact, every reason for not doing so. As Justinian walked along, his eyes on all sides and his ears open, he heard a crackling of dry wood among the bushes on his right, and, looking in that direction, saw a girl—it was Esther Morideg—binding together a faggot of sticks tightly with a rope.

'Hallo! what are you doing there? Stealing, eh?' shouted Justinian, and ran up the bank towards her.

'No more stealing than you,' answered the girl. 'You've a-been poaching.'

'I have not,' retorted the boy. 'The keeper gave me the rabbits.'

'Oh, ah! the keeper can be mighty free wi' what ain't his own. I've knowed 'n give something better nor rabbits afore this.'

'That is neither here nor there. What's your name?'

'I don't care, but you may know—I be Esther Morideg.'

'Where do you live?'

'Out on the moor under Boarrah.'

'You have no right here, taking wood.'

The girl slung her bundle over her shoulder and leaped lightly into the road.

'Thickey be my way,' she said, pointing over the heathery hill on the further side of the stream. 'And I be going to take the firing, whatever you mun say.'

'You are stealing, you know you are.'

Without further regarding his remonstrance, the girl took to her heels, and Justinian, nettled at her audacity, ran after her.

Finding that he was about to outstrip her, Esther turned sharply round, and whirled her faggots by the cord that bound them, swung them about Justinian's bamboo, caught it, and with the weight of the wood wrenched it from his hand.

'There,' said she; 'now let me go my road. You've naught occasion to say I be stealing. What's that to you if I be? But I bean't. Miss Alice and me be good friends, and her'd never deny me a few sticks for firing.'

'Miss Alice has nothing to do with them.'

'Her has though—her's squire now, I reckon.'

'No, she is not. My father is squire.'

'Your father! And who be he then?'

'Mr. Percival Curgenven. What do you say to that? Put down the sticks and give me up my bamboo.'

'Take 'em if you can,' said the girl. 'You can catch me up fast enough on the road—I can't run on that; but let me be on the moor, and I'll beat any horse, I will. Now then, my road be yonder. I'll run wi' my bundle and this stick, and see if you can catch me, eh?'

'Done,' said Justinian. 'And look here, if you beat me you shall have free right to pick sticks in our woods as long and as much as you like. My father never denies me anything, and I'll promise that for him and for me. What's more, I'll give you a distance—I won't be beaten by a girl.'

In a moment, over the bank she leaped, carrying the faggot on her shoulder, and holding Justinian's bamboo in her right hand, and ran like a hare over the marsh, leaping from tuft to tuft of rushes. She had got some way before the boy had realized that she was off, and then he pursued her, delighted to have some fun whilst waiting for his father.

But hardly had he got into the marshy mead near the water than he floundered in over his ankles, then up to his knees, and was forced to labour forward with difficulty.

To his vexation, he saw the girl on the other side of the little river. She had crossed it, had put down the faggot and was sitting on it, laughing and watching him as he toiled in slow pursuit through the bog.

It irritated Justinian to hear her shrill laughter and the clapping of her hands, as he floundered deeper and deeper the more vehement his efforts to get forward.

At length, bemired to above his knees, he did reach the brink of the stream, and then he looked across at her. His tall bamboo was leaning against her shoulder, like a rod of gold in the evening sun that smote down the valley, and her wild red hair glowed in the same light like a halo of copper in the furnace about her handsome face, rich in colour as an apricot from exposure to the winds. Her hands were raised and outspread to clap again in applause, and one end of the rod rested against her thrust-forth foot. Justinian had something of the artistic faculty in him, and he was struck by the picture before him. His ill-humour disappeared, and he shouted, 'I shall catch you up yet!' then dashed into the water.

Instantly Esther was afoot, had thrown up the faggot and started for the wood and hill. At this point the river swept close to the roots of the hill, so that there was no more swamp to struggle through; but there was a hedge to be climbed, made very compact to prevent bullocks from breaking into the coppice and destroying the young pines planted in the gaps between the oak-stools.

Esther surmounted the hedge like a squirrel and began to run up the steep hill-side, aided materially by Justinian's staff. The stools of coppice had sprouted; they were of some five years' growth since last 'rended' for bark, and the young oak, Justinian thought, must catch the sticks of the faggot and arrest the girl; but she was perfectly prepared for the difficulty. She tossed the bundle of sticks upon her head and held it there as she scrambled upwards, dodging the clumps of oak till she had traversed the coppice zone and was out on the heather. There she gained rapidly, and speedily reached the summit of a fine slate rock that rose abruptly from the slope and was scrambled over by ivy and crowned with heather and sloe-bushes.

On reaching this point Esther, with a laugh, knelt, threw down her faggot, and, ripping the sloe-berries from the bushes, began to pelt Justinian with them as he ascended. He was panting and hot, and by this time aware that he was unequally matched against the wild girl, who ran up a hill-side, steep as the slope of a Gothic roof, with as much ease as if it were level ground, and who, as her laugh proclaimed, had not lost breath in so doing.

'Will y' now consent that you're beat?' asked the girl of Justinian, as she stooped on one knee on the rock. 'I'll throw y' down your stick if you will.'

'I will not,' gasped the boy, mortified, but not prepared to acknowledge his ill-success. There was smooth turf above the heather, and he trusted to gain on her when on less steep ground and on ground less dense with shrubs.

'Very well,' said Esther, 'then I'll run again.'

She picked up her bundle, and started once more, mounting swiftly and without apparent toil.

When she did reach the turfy head of the hill, she set off at a run, whereas Justinian was out of breath, and unable to get any further till he had recovered wind.

Esther turned, after she had run a little way, and seeing that he made no efforts to pursue her, she came back, but allowed sufficient distance to intervene between them so as to give her the start of him should he resume the pursuit.

'Come here,' he said, 'I'm beat. Let there be *pax* between us.'

'I don't know what *pax* be,' she said suspiciously.

'Let us be good friends, then. You said you were that with my Cousin Alice. You shall be the same with me.'

'I reckon I will wi' a' my heart.'

At once, with perfect frankness and absence of doubt in his sincerity, she threw down the faggot, and came forward to him, extending her right hand, holding his tall bamboo in the left.

He was breathless and hot, the drops of perspiration standing on his brow. He cast aside his cap, and then took her hand.

'All right,' said he, 'we're chums! I never thought to be beat in anything by a girl. What a wind you've got, you cat, and how you climb!'

'It a' comes o' where you run,' said Esther, willing to lessen his mortification by a concession. 'If 'twere on a road, you'd outrun me i' a score o' strides. But on the grass it be different. You've been 'customed to roads, and I to turf; that's what makes it.'

'You'll give me back my bamboo?'

'The stick? for sure I will. There you have it;' she put the staff into his hand.

Then Justinian held out to her the pair of rabbits he had been carrying.

'There,' said he, 'take these. I give them to you with all my heart. I did not get them by poaching. I am the young squire, and all Curgenven belongs to my father. I have a right to all the rabbits. Take them, they are for you, and you shall have more another time. Do you live in one of our houses, on our land?'

'I live out to Tolmenna—that's under Boarrah.'

'I suppose it is ours. The Curgenven estate, I know, is large. Well, I promise you, you shall have sticks for firing as long as you live on our estate, and shall not need to buy or ask. I give it you. My father will always allow what I promise.'

'Thanky,' said Esther, 'I'll e'en take 'em, and I kiss your hand for 'em.'

She stooped to suit the action to the word, and, as is done in Cornwall still, pressed her lips to his hand.

'Well!' said Justinian, snatching away his hand, 'that is the reverse of the proper order,' and he suddenly caught her face between his hands and kissed her on the cheek.

She drew back offended and flushing scarlet.

'Nay!' she said angrily, 'I won't have the rabbits now.'

'You shall. If you won't carry them home, I'll go after you to Tolmenna with them to your mother.'

'My mother is dead.'

'Then your father.'

'You won't find him—he's a pixy.'

Justinian burst out laughing. 'Then I quite understand why I was beaten. There, take the rabbits, I meant no harm, honour bright. Now look here, what is your name?'

'Esther.'

'Then we're chums, are we not? You'll not run away from me again. I hear my father calling down below. He will be wondering what has become of me.'

Justinian shouted into the valley to Mr. Percival, and then, waving his hand to the girl, plunged down the hill.

She stooped, reloaded herself with the faggot, and tossed the pair of rabbits on it, and went forward on her way home. Thoughts were working in her mind, a cloud and then a gleam passed alternately over her face.

Suddenly she stood still, and, throwing up her head, sang a snatch of her favourite song:—

'There bain't a saucy lad I wot,
   With light and roguish eye,
That doth not love a pretty lass,
   And kiss her on the sly.
There bain't a maiden i' the land
   From Hartland Point to Brent,
I' velvet or i' fustian gown,
   That will his kiss resent.
      Golden furze in bloom!
         Oh, golden furze in bloom!
      When the furze be out of flower
         Then love is out of tune.'

And as she went onward she hummed the tune to herself, but always to the words of the same stanza.

Justinian had reached the road where his father stood awaiting him.

'Why, boy! where have you been the while?'

'Up yonder, father.'

'What have you been doing?'

'Making acquaintance with the tenants.'

'Oh! that is right. Where are the rabbits?'

'I gave them to the tenant.'

'That is well; get on good terms at once.'

'Certainly, father.'

'These farmers get as many rabbits as they like without asking.'

'This was not a farmer, father.'

'Not a farmer? Who was he?'

'Not a he at all.'

'Oh! be judicious, boy, don't be on too good terms with the tenants—that is to say, those who are *shes*. You understand.'

CHAPTER XV.

A REFUSAL.

THERESA was in the little up-stairs parlour of Miss Treise, that served as show-room. She was packing her box. In the event of a customer arriving to be tried on, fitted, or measured, Theresa was enjoined to throw a damask cover over the box, so as to give it the appearance of being an ottoman.

She had brought her little writing-desk out of the bed-room to place it in the box, near the bottom; but before doing so she seated herself on the sofa, with the desk on her lap. She was tired, and would rest a moment before proceeding with the packing.

She was to leave Liskeard for Scotland on the morrow, having closed with Mr. Pamphlet's proposal that she should enter into his daughter's service as governess and companion. The offer had been accepted without alacrity, for it was not one that greatly tempted. The salary was not high—forty pounds—the duties somewhat mixed. She was to help Mrs. Boxholder in housekeeping, entertain her in wet weather and when her spirits were damp, and educate her two daughters. One was to be finished off, and the other begun with her schooling; this latter, having been delicate, had not been pressed, and might be said to know nothing, whereas her elder sister was, according to Mr. Pamphlet and her mother, an extraordinary genius, vastly well educated.

Theresa had gone through many phases of life. Her mind and heart had opened under a kind old lady who had indulged and petted her. Then, as a mere child she had been plunged in the eddies of life, and swept into marriage before she was well aware what it meant—thrown up into this state because there existed no other in which she could take refuge. She had been neglected by the man who had sworn to stand by her and protect her. They had both rubbed their eyes and found themselves unsuited to each other, and he incapable of supporting her; they had discovered, moreover, that neither cared for the other. Then she had plunged back into the torrent into which she had been cast before, relying on her own strong will and abilities, and for nineteen years had been battling with the stream, now submerged, then rising to the surface, swimming to sustain life, not to reach any shore. When young and sanguine she had hoped with her efforts to gain some place of security. She had long ago abandoned that hope. She must strike out merely to enable her to inhale a few more lungfuls of air, see a little more of the light of day. It was but a matter of time, and then she must fold her weary arms and sink.

She had tried her fortunes in several directions. When the attentions of the Marchese Gioberti at Malta became annoying, and were liable to affect her honour, and she was unable through lack of means to pay her bill at the hotel, and go away, she had appealed for help to an American lady at Naples, who she knew was shortly returning to New Orleans. She stated her case, and offered to do anything, everything in her power to be of use to the lady—to be her companion, her lady's-maid—if she would release her from her embarrassments. The lady had at once responded to the appeal, with characteristic American generosity; Theresa had joined her at Sorrento, and gone with her to the States.

Unwilling to be a burden, she had striven to earn her own livelihood as a teacher of music and of languages. Then she had become a public singer in concerts, and had even ventured on the stage. In no case had she met with success sufficient to kindle in her the confidence that she would be able to look to her future without concern.

She had encountered discouragements, met with rebuffs that had wounded her to the quick, and had been courted with attentions still more galling. Thrown entirely upon herself she had been forced, like a beast that has many enemies, to develop tact, to exercise caution, and to maintain a determined courage.

A long sickness had consumed what savings she had collected, and had deteriorated her voice, so that she could not expect with that organ to earn her bread for the future. There were no other resources left her but to be a sempstress or a governess.

As she sat, holding the writing-desk, a sense of her loneliness came over her. She had no place that she could in any way regard as a home, and no one to whom she could cling as a relative; she had not even a friend. When she had taught young girls, her heart would sometimes yearn towards a pupil, but after a term or two the pupil left, the growing affection was arrested. In her professional career as a singer she had made acquaintances, but before acquaintanceship ripened into friendship, engagements in opposed directions interrupted the growth.

When Theresa was in Rome she had seen in the Pædagogium on the Palatine Hill the scrawl of a slave, that represented an ass turning a mill, with its inscription, 'Work away, ass, as I have worked, and it will profit you as much.'

She was going again to the mill, to trudge her round, and little profit would it bring her. She saw before her naught but a future of dull and deadening routine.

The little desk in her hand was all that remained to her out of her early life. It had been given her on her fourteenth birthday by Mrs. Fenton. It recalled to her the kind tones and looks of the old lady, the touch of her caressing hand. She remembered how, in her childish troubles, she had taken refuge on her lap, and snuggled her head into the bosom of her mother by adoption, and been coaxed and petted till she was happy again. Since the earth had closed over the dear old lady, Theresa had met with no sincere love. She had been scorched by the transient flare of the passion of Lambert Curgenven. She had longed with a tender woman's heart for sympathy, for affection, but had found neither anywhere; and now she had come to suppose it never could be had.

When she was old, and sick, and failing, who would care for her? When she was borne to her grave, who would follow her?

Her namesake, the Spanish mystic S. Theresa, had in vision found herself seated with her face set to a blank wall—not even lined out into blocks of stone. The sense of weariness in thus gazing at blankness became intolerable, and she cried out, and asked where she was. The answer came, 'In hell!'

Somewhere or other Theresa had met with this story, and it was to her as though she could now realize something of the oppression and numbness of mind of the saint, as she looked at her own future, in which was nothing to awaken interest, nothing to encourage hope, nothing to satisfy desire.

She was startled from the reverie by hearing a voice on the stairs—'All right, Bessy, I can find my way up!' and in another moment Mr. Physic was in the room.

'How do you do!' he exclaimed, holding out his palm.

'Excuse me,' answered Theresa, 'I have but one hand I can use, and that is engaged.' She slightly raised the desk.

'Not yet well! My dear, what a long time it takes to patch up a collar-bone. Well! I have good news for you. The old parson has commissioned me to act. His daughter is too proud to come and see you, and she won't let him come. But here'—he took out a purse—'here are ten pounds for you, to pay journey money and for necessary outlay.'

'I decline to receive a present,' said Theresa.

'Don't. Take it as pay, and shabby pay it is. If you chose to go into court and prove yourself to have been the lawful wife of the captain, no doubt in the world but you could get an order and obtain an annuity out of his estate—say three hundred. That parson and his daughter are indebted to you. They know that. Besides, you save Mrs. Jane's good name, which is to her above everything. You place her and her father under a lasting obligation, and could make them spoon out more jam than this, if you chose. But let it be by little. If you know how to manage it, you can get a hundred pounds at any time.'

'You misunderstand me,' said Theresa haughtily. 'I had no such meaning, and have no such intention. When I say that I refuse a present, I say that this money, which I am constrained to accept, so as to pay Miss Treise what I owe her, is regarded by me as a loan, so far as it is not expended on my journey. Mrs. Boxholder has undertaken to pay for that.'

'As you please; but for pity's sake do not cut off your nose to spite your face—and such a pretty face, too.'

He seated himself on the sofa at her side.

Theresa at once rose, and stepped from him.

'Why do you get up?' he asked.

'We can talk together with more comfort when face to face, and with my box between.'

'Well, this is not civil to me; and I have done my best in your cause, managed your affairs famously, and without pay—so far.'

'What do you ask?'

'Oh, none of your ten pounds; I am not so mean as to take pickings out of that.'

He looked at her and compressed his lips.

'Now, look here,' said he, 'I can quite understand that your position was one of difficulty when the captain was alive, a difficulty, by George, that did not trouble him greatly. But now you are free to contract a new marriage, and a woman of your good looks——'

'Mr. Physic!' said Theresa, the blood darkening her cheek, and her brows contracting, 'I pray you spare me words that might force me to leave the room. I am glad you are here, for I have a duty to perform.' She put the desk on the little table, and, opening it, produced the envelope she had taken from the desk of the deceased husband. 'I am bound to give this up to you—bound by what is written on the cover.'

Mr. Physic sprang to his feet; a look of blank surprise came over his face as he snatched the packet from her hand, read what was inscribed on the envelope, and hastily turned it about to assure himself that the seal was unbroken. The large red sealing-wax impression of the Curgenven arms was intact.

'By Jove!' said the agent, 'the very thing I have been wondering did not turn up. I knew he had written it, but was not sure he had not destroyed it again. Where the deuce did you find it, and how the dickens did you come by it?'

'I found it in his olive-wood desk, in the room of the bungalow, I think you call the place—where I was put.'

'And, you sly rogue, you took it?'

'I took it. I did not suppose any one else had a better right to it than myself. My key opened his desk; it had done so when we were married.'

'I am not surprised, then, that you quarrelled,' he continued, turning over the envelope.

'You did not possess yourself of his seal, open this, and refasten it?' He looked suspiciously at her.

'I did nothing of the kind. On the cover is a requisition that this should be put into your hands, and yours only. I fulfil the wish of my poor husband in doing this. You are to use it or not, so I read, according to circumstances.'

'Yes. In the event of a certain thing happening, undefined, but known to me, I might use this. You can't guess what that contingency was?' He leered at her.

'I do not trouble myself to ask. I am quite sure the enclosed does not concern me.'

'Oh, no; certainly it does not.'

'You know the contents?'

'In a measure. I was consulted.'

He looked at the cover, then at Theresa.

'By Jove!' said he, 'I'm glad Mrs. Curgenven—old hawk—did not pounce on this. Do you think she'd have cared about what was written on the cover, and given it to me unopened? Not she; for one, because she detests me, and would have turned me out of the agency years ago if she could have brought the captain to it; and for two, because she is too pious to be conscientious. She'd have peeped in, and once her nose in——' He smacked his lips. Then he thrust the packet into his breast-pocket. 'Why, my goodness! dear, you've done me a great favour, you have indeed. Bless you! bless you!'

He put his hands behind him, under his coat-tails, and standing with his feet wide apart, ruminated for a while. 'Look here,' said he, 'if you won't sit by me, then, you sit down on your box, and let me occupy the sofa, and we'll come to some arrangement between us.'

'There is nothing to arrange.'

'My dear! nothing to arrange! There is everything. You have done me a great favour, and I am not ungrateful. I am ready to return the favour. What do you say, now, to having me? I've never been married on the sly before, and given the wife the slip, as did somebody; but, *de mortuis*, you know.'

'You are very kind, Mr. Physic, but——'

'Oh, sit down, I pray you be seated; take the box, the cover will bear your weight. Now let us rub our noses together and arrange about it.'

Theresa thought the best way of parrying what was coming was to laugh and say, 'I am not accustomed to rub noses with any individual, certainly not with a gentleman. As you see, I am busy packing. Our business together is over, since you have handed me the ten pounds, and I have handed you poor Captain Curgenven's will, or whatever it is. I will go into my own room and write a receipt, and send it you by the maid, Bessy. As you perceive, I am busy.'

Mr. Physic rubbed his eyes, then his nose, then his knees. 'Lawk!' said he, 'I'm refused! Who'd have thought it? What is the world of women coming to? They've neither taste nor manners.'

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE TRAIN.

Theresa started for the station an hour before the train was due. This was because the one omnibus which the town entertained had to ramble about the place picking up such persons as had notified their desire to be picked up and conveyed to meet the express up train. Liskeard is not a town in which the pulse of life beats furiously, nor the whirr of commerce turns heads giddy. Except on market day there is very little business done in the shops, and except when the one omnibus jaunts about seeking travellers, very few persons are visible in the streets.

But when that lumbering conveyance waddles about the town, every one rushes to the window or to the door to see who is going to leave Liskeard, and to conjecture the reason and the duration of absence. The draper is outside growling because such and such ladies are obviously going into Plymouth for a day's shopping, instead of accepting and being thankful for such bad matches in colour, such short lengths of material, such antiquated patterns, as he has in stock; and the grocer in his apron is on his doorstep, objurgating because certain customers are going into Plymouth to bring home real oysters and salmon, instead of resting content with his tinned preparations. The omnibus halts at the vicarage to receive a deputation from some missionary society, and to lay on the roof his portmanteau, one compartment of which is stuffed with scalps, idols, and tomahawks, that have been exhibited the preceding evening at a great meeting in aid of foreign missions, in the school-room, and then bounces off to one of the inferior inns to pick up some professionals who have been giving a nigger concert in the town-hall, and who have their costumes and musical instruments with them, all to be accommodated on the roof. Then the omnibus rolls away into a suburb to take up a lady who is going out of her mind, and is attended by a keeper. Next it rambles off in an opposite direction into another suburb to collect some children who are returning to school, and sob in the omnibus when they do not howl. Finally, it picks up commercial travellers here and there, with their familiar boxes of samples. At last, when the hour is nearly expended, the omnibus directs its way towards the station.

Theresa had been able out of the ten pounds given her by Mr. Physic to satisfy Miss Treise, to fee the servant, Bessy, and to extinguish the trifling accounts against her in one or two of the shops. She then had sufficient money left to carry her to Scotland,—sufficient, not too much, though possibly there might be a few shillings over, when she reached Drumduskie, the residence of Mrs. Boxholder.

An inexplicable sense of regret came over Theresa as she left Liskeard. There was no reason why she should regard it as a home, and yet she felt that it was the only place in the world with which she was at all linked, the only place to which she was not absolutely indifferent. It was the town to which Curgenven looked as its headquarters. The only person who had belonged to her—Captain Lambert—was buried near there. Mr. Percival had been attentive and kind to her, he was the cousin of her dead husband, and he lived in Liskeard. She had passed through an epoch of her life there —great pain and anxiety of mind—and the place where one has suffered does somehow exercise a hold over the feelings. She was going to Scotland—entirely strange to her—and to persons whom she knew by name only. She was sorry not to have seen Mr. Percival and thanked him for what he had done for her, but he had not been to see her for the last two or three days, he had been busy at Curgenven. She resolved to write to him from Drumduskie, and express to him her sense of obligation.

She had taken her ticket for London, by Plymouth and Exeter, and had seen her box labelled. She was making her way into a second-class carriage of the express, avoiding equally that into which the deputation thrust himself and lugged his portmanteau, and that which the nigger melodists invaded, and that into which the madwoman was with difficulty forced, when a hand was laid on her shoulder, and turning, she saw Mr. Percival Curgenven.

'By Moses!' said he. 'My dear patient—you off! and never a word of farewell. There she goes—in with you, quick; and by the powers I'll come too—as far as Plymouth—I want a talk.'

The train was in motion, but he helped Theresa in, and then, in spite of the exclamations of the guard and station-master, he swung himself in and shut the door, then looked out, and waved his hat mockingly at the station-master and a porter who had endeavoured to pull him on to the platform by the tails of his coat.

Mr. Percival turned round, laughed heartily, and threw himself into a seat.

'The fun of the thing is,' said Mr. Percival, 'I haven't more than a fourpenny-bit in my purse, and I haven't a ticket. I say—Signora! no, I mustn't call you that any more—patient! can you lend me the needful? Now is not this a rum situation? Here am I, Squire of Curgenven, with an estate of four thousand a year, and haven't more than fourpence in my purse. I had a few shillings, but I spent them over a fish-cart in buying some soles I paid for. Now I have only fourpence. Can you help me?'

'What do you want?' asked Theresa.

'I don't know. Only a couple of shillings or so, to take me to Plymouth. When there I suppose I can get money. I'll go to the bank, anyhow, and see what they will do for me. I've no account there. I never had a banking account in my life, for I never had any money to put into the bank. But they knew my dear old Lambert's cheques to me—and they must take my word for it that I am squire now, worth in prospect four thousand per annum, with—unless they will help me—less than fourpence, for I shall owe you my fare.'

Mr. Curgenven looked round the compartment to observe whether it were occupied by any person he knew. Having satisfied himself that all were strangers, he said to Theresa, 'I say—now where are you off to? Not that humbug Mrs. Boxholder, I trust. Not off to the Arctic regions?'

'I am going to Drumduskie.'

'Well, there—what an odd state of affairs it is for you and for me. Here am I a wealthy man who is penniless. Yesterday in despair because I thought my hundred and fifty was at an end, now elate because of my four thousand coming in, but just at this present moment fallen into destitution and obliged to borrow a couple of shillings of you, because I can't finger what is to be mine, and have spent all that was mine. I went in for those soles to have a flare up with Justinian, thinking I was a millionaire.'

It was not possible for Theresa to refrain from laughing, notwithstanding her depressed mood.

'I say, patient,' pursued Mr. Percival, 'can you lend me five shillings? Then I shall have enough to take me back for certain, without running the risk of being snubbed at the bank. They know me at the Liskeard branch, they don't know my face at the Plymouth shop.'

'I cannot spare you much,' said Theresa, 'for really I am pinched. I do not know what my fare will be from town to Edinburgh, and thence on to Drumduskie.'

'Bother Drumduskie—you shan't go there.'

'I must indeed. I am engaged.'

'Cut the whole concern.'

'I cannot do that. I have no other means of livelihood: besides, I have had my journey money advanced.'

'Oh, hang it! you've been treated abominably. I know all about it now. Signora, have you any cotton wool in your reticule? If so, do let me have it to plug up that old gentleman's ears. I don't want him to be made acquainted with our family affairs. Our family—that does seem odd. By the way, Signora, why did you not tell me your real name at Frisco?'

'I did not care that any one should know it, but I will admit I was drawn to feel an interest in your poor wife by the name she bore.'

'Well, all I can say is, old Pamphlet and the madam have got rid of you uncommon cheap. Lord! to think of her—that pink of prudes, that paragon of propriety—finding herself to be a very improper character indeed, no better than she should be—it is simply killing. But you don't know her, and have not suffered from her as I have. Bless you! she has never liked me. She sat on pins and needles whenever I came over to Curgenven, and could hardly contain herself from being rude. Dear old Lambert, she would have led him a life, but that happily he did not mind it, everything slipped off him that she heaped on; and he as cheerful and cool as possible. I say, amiable Jane would melt into her boots if you blew upon her; she would, upon my soul. Her position, her morality, her nose-in-the-airedness are to her everything, and life would be insufferable to her without them. You keep dark, and she lives. Blaze out your tale, and it will eclipse her.'

'I am not going to blaze out a tale I have kept to myself these many years.'

'But really, it seems monstrous that you should come off no better. You have to think twice before you advance me five bob, lest you should not have enough money to carry you to Dustyfiddles—no, Dustydrums it is.'

'You must remember the sacrifice she is making—she loses Curgenven.'

'That she loses anyhow. She should pay you something worth having for keeping a very unpleasant secret.'

'But suppose I absolutely refuse payment?'

'No—do you?'

'Absolutely. I was offered it and I refused.'

'Well—upon my word, you are hard used. But, Signora—no, hang it! I won't call you that, and something else I suppose I mustn't call you; I can say cousin, and dash me but I will.'

'Very well,' laughed Theresa; 'say cousin then, if that will please you.'

'Yes, I can say so in a railway carriage, where no one hears me, or is the wiser if he does; but I can't say it elsewhere, not in Liskeard for instance.'

'I am not in Liskeard, and shall never be there again.' A little sigh escaped her.

'By Jove, that's hard. I say, cousin, I got hideously tired of being kicked about like a football, and was everlastingly thankful when dear old Lambert settled me at Liskeard—the missus wouldn't allow him to quarter me anywhere nearer—and relieved me of embarrassment for the future. Have you never felt sick of being kicked about?'

She did not answer. He looked her frankly in the face, and saw the pain and desolation written there.

'By Jove, Theresa, it shall not be. Hang me to the telegraph wire poles if it be so. I shall have four thousand a year—fancy, such a chap as I, who never in his life before had more than a hundred and fifty. I who was perfectly happy in a Pill-box must stretch myself out in a manorial mansion. Good Lord! who'd have thought it? It makes me astonished beyond measure at my good luck whenever I think of it—and that is all day long. So I am in a continual state of tearing amazement. But I say, Theresa—hang me if I won't call you that—I can easy cut you a slice off my cake. How much will you have? Three hundred?'

'I'll have none, thank you, but the five shillings you will owe me.'

'Tickets, please,' said the collector, opening the door.

'Here—I haven't got one—she'll pay for me,' said Mr. Percival.

Theresa furnished the requisite sum.

'You're the gent as got in when the train was in motion at Liskeard?' asked she collector.

'Yes, that is he—and, sir! you have made yourself liable to penalties,' said the guard.

'I say, old chap!' answered Mr. Percival, 'a word in your ear. I am now Squire Curgenven of Curgenven, and I shall travel up and down by your line, and not forget the conductor. You understand—only just now, I've but fourpence.'

'Right, sir!' Then—'Your good lady's dress is in the way of the door.'

Percival turned round and laughed. 'I say, Theresa, did you hear that? I wonder now how long we shall be at Plymouth before your train goes on. I've a great mind to go on with you as far as Exeter, and see you safe through those confounded tunnels in the red sandstone that are incessantly tumbling in.'

'You cannot indeed. Fourpence will not suffice; and I can lend no more money.'

'Well, then, I must be content to see you off. Hang me! I don't half like it. It was as pleasant to me to talk to you of old times and old scenes, and of my poor dear wife, as it was for Lambert to have me to talk to, a bit of relief from the old cat. What do you say to this? Will you occupy the Pill-box when I move to Curgenven?'

'Indeed I will not,' said Theresa. 'I have told you I must earn my livelihood.'

'You are an obstinate hussy.'

They had reached Plymouth. Some carriages had to be shunted. Theresa got out, and so did Percival Curgenven. They walked the platform together. Then he dashed away to the bookstall to buy some illustrated papers—swept together a *Punch*, an *Illustrated London News*, the *Field*, and the *Queen*—and found he had not the money to pay for them. He was forced to surrender all but *Punch*, which he brought to Theresa.

'It is a hideous nuisance,' said he, 'I can't give you more than this to amuse you on the way. Confound it—I wish I were going to Exeter with you. You'll be lonely and dull.'

'Now then!' shouted the guard. 'All for London take your places. Will you and your good lady step in, please?'

'There he is again,' said Percival, as he helped Theresa into her second-class carriage. The guard turned the handle.

'I'm sorry about the illustrated papers,' said Percival, looking in through the window. 'And mind, going through the tunnels, to keep your head in. I'll not forget the five bob. I'll write; Drumduskie—that's it.'

The train was in movement, he ran beside the carriage, with his head in. 'I say, let it be as he said; why not? My good lady—and Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

'Now then!' a shout from a porter. He was caught by the shoulder and pulled away, without receiving his answer.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT THE VAULT.

Mr. Percival Curgenven came to Curgenven to take possession in the Curgenven carriage that he had ordered to be at the Pill-box for him.

He more than half expected that he would be welcomed by a peal of bells from the church tower, but was mistaken. With that tact which so characterizes our English peasantry, the ringers felt that after the tragic death of the late squire, and with the retirement of the widow to the parsonage, a merry peal would be out of place. They knew that a peal would be honoured with a sovereign fee, but they forbore the fee rather than make their bells jar with the feelings of their rector's daughter and the orphaned child.

Mr. Percival was excited and joyous; it was a great day for him to come in as representative of the Curgenven family into the ancestral home, a great thing to escape from penury into wealth, and he thought that not all Curgenven only, but Liskeard as well, should be excited and rejoice with him.

But his elation subsided towards evening. He had rambled through the rooms, and had begun to feel that there was not in them the cosiness of the Pill-box, and that with many servants many sorrows began. But there were other causes to damp his excitement.

'Please, sir!' said the footman, 'there's Mr. Huxtable would like to see your honour!'

'Who's Mr. Huxtable, John?'

'I believe, sir, the farmer at Tregolwyn.'

'I'll come and see him. Show him into the study.

Percival followed the footman, and was soon shaking hands with a heavy-browed, dark-haired, high-cheekboned man, broad in the shoulder and at the hip, who walked clumsily, and who with himself introduced into the library a strong odour of stable-yard.

'Beautiful day,' said Mr. Huxtable.

'It is. You want to see me?'

'I'm ray—ther afraid if we get rain now, the sheep may get rot in their feet.'

'There is a danger of that, I suppose.'

'And how do you feel yourself now, squire?'

'Oh! very well, very well indeed. You wanted to speak to me, I believe?'

After much beating about the bush, discussion of the weather, the price of fat stock, the condition of the turnips, the yield of wheat to the acre, Farmer Huxtable came to the point. It was this:

'Well, sir, I thought I'd come airly and see your honour. The late squire never somehow could find time or money to put my outbuildings to rights, and there's the roof of the linney falled in, and the cowsheds be that deep in water, with there being no drain, and the airth outside bein' higher than the floor, that it's over-cold for calves and they dies; and the pigsties be against our house wall, and there be great cracks as you might put your fist through, and the smitch (smell) comes in strong enough to turn the strongest stomick; and the chimney o' the sittin'-room do smoke terrible; my missus hev gone to the ex-pense o' papering the room, but lor' bless your honour! the paper be all black wi' smoke already. Her wants a proper register grate putting in, and the chimley raisin'; and her thinks if the floor were lowered the room 'ud be a better height; and the rats run about the corn-chamber and eat a bushel a night; and if your honour would have it cemented all round, and fresh floored wi' sawn slates, it 'ud keep out the rats; and the doors and basements han't been painted these eighteen years and be all gone rotten as touchwood, and if your honour would come and see, they won't hold together another winter. And the roof o' the pound-house be nigh blown away——'

'And what do you think, Mr. Huxtable, the repairs will cost?'

'Well, sir—I d'rsay five hundred pounds 'ud do something towards it, but to make it as it should be—I d'rsay it 'ud cost about double.'

A rap at the door, and John came in.

'Please sir, when you are disengaged, Mr. Obadiah Matters would like to see you, sir.'

'Well, Mr. Huxtable, I'll come over to Tregolwyn and see what must be done—but a thousand pounds is a great sum.'

'Well, sir, I could put up, maybe, wi' five hundred this year, if your honour 'd spend another five hundred next year. I'll talk to the missus about it.'

Then he was shown out, and Mr. Obadiah Matters was shown in. This was a farmer on a large scale. Three decent farms had been amalgamated. When Captain Lambert came into the estate he found Tregowan, Llandhu, Leswith were farm-houses, with ruinous outhouses and ruinous themselves. They and all the farm buildings needed rebuilding; the cost of each would be about fifteen hundred pounds. At the advice of Mr. Physic, Captain Curgenven threw the three together and built large and admirable barns, stables, farmhouse, at Tregowan, and pulled Llandhu and Leswith down, or turned what remained into fairly sound cottages. This extensive farm was taken by Mr. Obadiah Matters. His daughters read French novels and played operatic music.

'How do, sir, how do?' said Mr. Matters patronizingly. 'I've come to see you at the outset, squire, that there may be no misunderstanding later. I suppose Physic has told you about me.'

'Oh yes,' said Percival Curgenven, 'he informed me that you pleaded inability to pay any rent last court, and that you were five years in arrear.'

'I did not mean that,' answered Mr. Matters hastily; 'I meant the conditions on which I stay on. I have insisted on a billiard-room being built for me and my friends, and a lawn-tennis ground being dug out on the side of the hill for my daughters. It will be quite impossible for me to take on the lease again without these additions being made to the place. We can't pig it as did our ancestors.'

'I think if you can't pay the rent, I will not ask you to take on the farm for another lease.'

'You'll get no one else. Tregowan is too large for any West-country farmer, and no man from the eastern shires will come here—and if he does, he won't understand our land or our climate, and so will speedily come to grief. You must have me or no one, or break up the farm into three or four, and that will cost you a pretty penny in buildings—more than my billiard-room and my daughters' tennis ground.'

'I'll talk it over with Mr. Physic, but I don't think, Mr. Matters, you'll find me very pressing to induce you to stay.'

'Oh, indeed—I'm sorry then for you.'

'Please, sir,' said the footman, coming in, 'there's Sir John Carmynow in the drawing-room, sir.'

'I'll be with him immediately. Good-day, Mr. Matters.'

On entering the parlour, he was greeted with cordiality by the baronet.

'My dear fellow, I've come over the first thing to call. I've a lot to ask you, and I thought I'd do it at once—at once and done with it. Glad to welcome you into our neighbourhood, and may you be a support of the pack and a prop to the Conservative cause. In the first place, how about the hounds? Captain Curgenven helped liberally towards the maintenance of the hunt. You see, my dear friend, we are none of us about here rich men, and not one of us can keep a pack alive. They say it costs a master a thousand for every day he hunts in the week. Well, two for foxhounds and two for harriers, that makes four thousand—and it has to be raised among us. We'll put you down for the same as poor Captain Lambert Curgenven, I suppose?'

'Oh yes, certainly.'

'And then—how about politics. You'll subscribe to the registering agent—but that's not enough. There's, as you know, an election coming on, and we must all work. You must be chairman of the Conservative meetings here, of course, and you must do your utmost.'

'Upon my soul,' said Percival, 'I've no political principles at all. I believe Great Britain is going to the dogs, and 'pon my life I don't know whether it would not be best with the Radicals to get her torn to pieces and done for finally as dogs' meat, and have it over, or try to stave it off, with the Conservatives. It is a satisfaction to take the pound from him who doesn't know its value, and give it to him with ten, who does know its worth to a penny.'

'Please, sir—the rector!' said John, showing in the Reverend Mr. Pamphlet.

'Why, Percival! how are you? How well you are looking!'

Presently, after some promiscuous conversation, Sir John Carmynow left. Then the rector, drawing close to Mr. Curgenven, said—'I've called in, just to make sure how we stand. I suppose you subscribe the same to the schools as we had from Lambert?'

'I suppose I must.'

'And to the clothing club?'

'Yes.'

'And to the coal club?'

'I suppose it is necessary.'

'Oh, absolutely. And to the shoe club?'

'How many more?'

'Oh, only the blanket club.'

'That is all, is it?'

'Well, there is the parochial lending library—but a guinea will suffice for that. I didn't quite gauge your views in matters theological, and so I don't know *which* you would support, the mission woman or the Scripture reader.'

'Oh, by Jove—I've no theological views whatever.'

'So much the better, then you will pay for both.'

'Thank you—you are very kind,' said Percival ironically.

'Then,' continued the rector blandly, and passed his hands through his white whiskers, 'some of us have been thinking it would be so nice to fill the east window with stained glass as a memorial to poor Lambert. I am sure the poor will gladly contribute their pence and the farmers their sixpences, if you will head the list. I think it might be done for a hundred pounds. It is a large window, you know. I will give five pounds, and poor dear Jane another five—out of her penury, casting in all that she can; and perhaps we could get together ten pounds in the parish. That will leave only eighty—and to you as squire that is nothing.'

'I think that must wait. I don't know on my soul what I shall have. The income of this property is nominally four thousand, but I find there is a mortgage on it of two hundred per annum, and the repairs and rebuildings will cost me at least a thousand a year. Put me down for nothing till I have had time to turn round and feel how I sit in this new seat. At the present moment, Mr. Pamphlet, it looks very much to me as though the outgoings were commensurate with the incomings. Sir John Carmynow has been here about the hunt.'

'But the church and parish first,' said the rector in a tone of solemnity.

Before sunset the new squire sauntered to the churchyard; he heard the notes of the organ sounding through the open door. Some one was practising. He had his pipe in his mouth when he passed through the graveyard gate, and he did not remove it from his mouth, but walked slowly, meditating, towards the Curgenven vault, that stood outside the south aisle of the church, and was covered with a large slate slab. Beneath that slab lay the captain.

With his hands in his pocket and the pipe in his mouth Percival stood looking at the slab, with the newly-cut inscription on it recording the interment of the late squire.

A reaction from the excitement had set in, and some moisture formed in his eye. He drew one hand from his pocket and removed the pipe from between his lips. Then he seated himself over against the family burying-place, on another stone, stretched his legs before him and remained with his chin on his breast, the pipe on his knee feebly sending forth a slight fume, and considered—he almost thought aloud. His lips moved, forming the words that rose up in his mind. 'Dear old boy! I'm confoundedly sorry for you, old chap. It takes all the pleasure out of my advancement to think that I step to it over your jolly old body. 'Pon my soul, Lambert, I'd a hundred thousand times rather be back in the Pill-box, and you in Curgenven. Who the deuce shall I have to talk to and play billiards with, and smoke a pipe, and drink a glass of whisky toddy with now, old boy? Peace be to your ashes, my dear Lambert,' said he aloud, and knocked out some of the dust from his pipe on the slab above the vault; then put the meerschaum to his lips again and puffed away vigorously to restore the glow. 'I swear to you, old man, I'll do what is right as far as I know how. But, Lambert—the state of the matter is mixed so that, on my word, I hardly know what ought to be done. I must say it even here, my billy-boy—your behaviour to your first wife was scurvy—I can't help it, scurvy is the word. And now in the light of eternity you know it, know it as well as I do, and are darned sorry for it, and would like to have it otherwise. I must take that into consideration, and do something for Theresa. That's your present desire, I could swear it. But your past wish was to provide for the second wife—so I suppose I must do something too for that rhinoceros, Jane. I'll do it—and for the kid also, I mean Alice, she's a little dear too. But I shan't let her have Curgenven. I have to consider the feelings and the wishes of all the other corpses in there along with you, Lambert, as well, and you know as well as I do that Curgenven must have as its owner a Curgenven. Alice is a darling, but she might marry a Tompkins, and then there would be a Tompkins of Curgenven. That would never do. It wouldn't be the same even if Tompkins assumed our name. No—Curgenven goes to Justinian. That's certain, and that is as it should be. My conscience will justify me in determining that. But it's other bones about the widows. How you could throw aside Theresa for Jane passes my understanding. If you had first married Jane and then kicked her over, I could have gone with you there; I'd have done it myself. And that you should have taken Theresa—that's explicable. But having Theresa, to get into harness with that kangaroo' —he shook his head. 'The world is full of puzzles. However, I need not bother my head about that. It was done. What am I to do? For nineteen years Theresa never had a penny from you, Lambert, more shame to you, and for sixteen or seventeen Jane has been spending as much of the Curgenven money as she cared to spend. That's not fair. To be fair, Theresa should have a run on the property for sixteen or seventeen years, and then after that both go shares equally. But I can't go wholly by what is fair—I must go by the expressed intention of Lambert. There is the three hundred for the widow—that was a provision in the settlement. They shall have it turn and turn about, and toss up who is to have the first pull. I shall put away three hundred a year for Alice, to form a sum on which she may be comfortably off hereafter.'

Then there dashed down the church avenue a boy—the organ-blower released. A few minutes later Mrs. Jane Curgenven issued from the porch, with her nose in the air, turning it from side to side.

'Piff!' said she—'a very strong scent of tobacco.'

Mr. Percival at once removed his pipe and attempted to pocket it; but Mrs. Curgenven had seen him.

'Really, Percival—smoking in the churchyard!—and at the vault! Upon my word, Percival, I could not have conceived that such a thing could be done! Have you no religious feelings—no sense of decency?'

'No harm meant, Jane.'

'But harm is done.'

'There is nothing wrong in smoking, any more than in smelling a scent-bottle.'

'There is wrong where there is indecorum. What is irreverent is profane, and what is profane is sinful.'

'I'm very sorry, Jane. I'll not do it again. I have knocked about in the West so much that I have forgotten some of the ways of civilization.'

'Of that I am well aware.'

'I say, Jane. I want a word with you. I am deadly sorry for this unfortunate business about the two Mrs. Curgenvens.'

'There is one only.'

'The two wives, you know. I have been turning about in my head what is the right thing to do with you both.'

'I do not want you to have anything to do with me,' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'and I refuse to be named in the same breath with another individual to whom you allude.'

'It is only this,' said Percival; 'that three hundred pounds per annum must go to the two wives between them, somehow.'

'If you speak like that you insult me.'

'I—I wish a score of men would insult me by offering me three hundred a year.'

'It is not that. *That* I admit I have a right to.'

'Not a right, Jane. It is true three hundred a year was the sum settled that the widow should have. But then there are *two*, you know; and I think if you could see your way to share and share about, and to toss up who should begin——'

'Mr. Percival,' said Mrs. Curgenven haughtily, 'if you mean this in joke, it speaks an obtuseness of moral sense which is deplorable. That you mean it seriously I cannot believe. Understand me for once and for all. I emphatically repudiate the notion of that abandoned woman having the smallest shadow of a right to be regarded as the wife of poor Lambert. If I submit to what my father has wished—that I waive my claim and that of my child—it is solely to spare Lambert's memory from being aspersed. Good-evening. I wish you may learn to behave respectfully to a lady before you again address her. I am—till you marry—Mrs. Curgenven. *When* you marry I am the dowager Mrs. Curgenven. Understand that, mark, and digest it.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

DRUMDUSKIE.

Theresa arrived at the little station of Drumduskie, weary and sick. She had travelled night and day; owing to having lent Mr. Percival Curgenven five shillings out of her journey money she had been too pinched to be able to obtain sufficient food on the way of a sustaining nature, and sausage-rolls and penny buns are not of a character, as supplied at refreshment stalls, to fortify the constitution to undergo a journey with hardly a break from Cornwall to Perth.

The vibrations of the train for such a continuance had, moreover, occasioned Theresa a good deal of pain in her fractured but rapidly healing collar-bone. These two causes combined to depress her spirits and damp that energy, if not vehemence of character, which naturally belonged to her.

On getting out at the little station she found no carriage waiting for her, and no porter who could carry her box. No conveyance was kept by the station-master, and she was constrained to walk two miles to Drumduskie itself. She was disappointed and discouraged. Mrs. Boxholder knew by what train she was to arrive—she had been apprised of that; and Theresa for a moment felt uneasy lest she should have come on the wrong day. With her disengaged arm she felt in her pocket for Mrs. Boxholder's letter, opened it, and satisfied herself that she herself had made no mistake.

She accordingly walked on to Drumduskie—the first walk of any length she had taken since her accident. On reaching the front door, and learning that Mrs. Boxholder was out, but was expected in shortly, she felt relieved, as it enabled her to sit down and rest from the fatigue before encountering her future mistress.

Theresa had been too tired to notice the house and the grounds as she came up, but they made no impression of grandeur on her. The servant who admitted her asked her to be seated in the hall until the lady returned, and as Theresa recovered she looked around her. The entrance-hall was fairly large, but the ceiling was very low, and there was a mark across it as though it were compounded of two rooms knocked into one by the removal of a wall. Some antlers of stags, old Scottish claymores, and a portrait, indifferently painted, furnished the walls, that were panelled in deal and painted to resemble oak.

Theresa remarked to the servant that her luggage was at the station, but the man doubted whether he could give orders for the boy to put the cob in the cart to fetch it before Mrs. Boxholder's return; he said he would ask her when she came in. She had gone for a constitutional walk, as the morning had been wet, and she never liked to be in all day. She had taken the young ladies with her.

After about a quarter of an hour the hall door opened, and a stout, short, sandy-whiskered gentleman, in knickerbockers and gaiters, came in. He was going through the hall to his room when he observed Theresa, came up to her, and held out his hand.

'How do you do—Mrs. Lambert, I suppose. I really hope you'll be happy here. Very glad to see you. The girls are not bad girls—when let alone. Is there anything I can do for you?'

He spoke in a very decidedly English accent, with a touch of cockneyism in it. Theresa thanked him, and mentioned her luggage.

'Oh yes, to be sure, it shall be seen to; but I'll just ask my wife first if we can have the spring-cart and the cob. I hope you'll get on well with her—but oh, here she is. I must be off;' and he skipped away into his smoking-room, nimble as a squirrel, as the door was thrust open with a certain imperiousness of manner that seemed to imply that the door stuck, and refused to open at its peril.

Then in came a very large stout lady, tall, with an eagle nose, very light hair, and very light eyelashes and pale eyes, followed by two girls.

'Oh! the new governess. Rose, Flora, take off your things in your rooms, and don't let them litter about. Now, understand me—no littering. Remain in your rooms till I send for you down.' The girls slunk up-stairs.

'Oh! crippled!' exclaimed Mrs. Boxholder. 'My father never informed me of that. This is serious. You never mentioned when you wrote that you were deprived of the use of an arm.'

Theresa had risen on the entrance of the lady, who seemed to swell and fill the hall, and choke the doors to the different rooms and obstruct the stairs, and who at the same time scented the atmosphere with a flavour of furs and black dye. She had both hands in a very big muff. After opening the door and observing Theresa she had thrust the right hand, to join the left, into the muff, and had not offered it to the newcomer.

'I have met with an accident,' said Theresa, spots of angry fire kindling on her cheeks. 'But it will pass—I was thrown out of a gig and broke a collar-bone, but my arm is uninjured. I shall shortly have it free once more.'

'That is well, for I shall want you to cut out. You cut out, I suppose?'

'After a fashion.'

'It must not be after *a* fashion, but after *the* fashion. Really it was too bad of my father—he should have mentioned this. It is an expensive journey from Cornwall here—cost me a lot of money; and one, of course, wishes to have some one who will answer my purpose and not be useless. I sincerely hope your collar-bone will be well speedily. You are Mrs. Lambert—brevet rank, or real?'

'I beg your pardon?'

'I mean a real widow?'

'Yes—my husband is dead.'

'Long ago?'

'Not long ago.'

'What was he? I particularly told my father that I must have a lady—a real lady by birth.'

'I am very sorry—I am not that. By birth I am nothing, less than nothing.'

'Oh, but you don't speak like—like a common person. There are reasons, family reasons, why it is essential in this house that the governess should be perfectly correct in her intonation, absolutely free from all dialectic peculiarities—of course excepting a slight touch of Scottish, to which I should not object. That there should be a strong counteracting influence to—let us say cockney twang—is, unfortunately, most important. I am glad you have not that.'

'I was thoroughly well educated by the kindest and most refined of ladies.'

'I am sorry about your birth; but your husband, what was he?'

'He was a captain in the navy.'

'In the commercial service, I suppose?'

'No, in her Majesty's navy.'

'Oh—that is something. No children?'

'No children at all.'

'I see you don't wear a widow's cap. I suppose you thought it as well not—as a governess. I have never seen a governess in a widow's cap, and—so it is best not. I suppose you have a pension from Government?'

'I have none.'

'How is that? Your husband in her Majesty's service, as captain, and you his widow, and no pension! I don't understand it. I thought that always—but I'll call Drumduskie. No, I'll go to him and consult about this—it is odd. By the way, I suppose you are hungry; you shall have some tea. I think before anything is absolutely settled I'll consult Drumduskie.'

Mr. Boxholder had been a London cornfactor. His mother had been a McNaught of Drumduskie. The McNaughts of Drumduskie were inconsiderable—something between farmers and lairds; but when the McNaught property came to the cornfactor, Mrs. Boxholder insisted on his retiring from business on the respectable fortune he had made, and setting up as a Scottish laird at Drumduskie. He himself was a plain man, with no pretence, who was happy in his commercial world, and found it difficult to fit himself for the new sphere into which he was plunged by the dominant will of his wife. She always spoke and wrote of him as Drumduskie; his Christian name, happily, was McNaught, so there was just a flavour of Scotland about him. Her persistence in converting the cornfactor into laird of Drumduskie amused the neighbours, annoyed her husband, but caused unbounded admiration in the bosoms of all the Pamphlet family, which flattered itself that it had two of its female members well married, one into an ancient Cornish squirearchical family, seated on its ancestral acres from prehistoric times—certainly from before the Conquest; the other into a Scottish family of patriarchal dignity and manners, with its proper tartan, of course, and its clan, its bagpipes, its own Drumduskie march, and its devoted adherents among the lower classes, who would die cheerfully for Drumduskie their chief. If Mrs. Boxholder could have had her way in every point she would have put the cornfactor into a kilt and bared his knees; but though he was a yielding man to her in many, indeed in most matters, in this he was obdurate; he tried to split the difference by wearing a very loud plaid suit, but this did not content madam, and she was now engaged in girding at him to join the Highland militia, so as to have some occasions in which he could wear the kilt and flourish his bare knees, and some excuse for appearing in his uniform on official and festal occasions; some justification for being painted, with a sheep-dog at his side—

not for the hall, as that was too low to receive so large a portrait, but for the drawing-room, which had been built on to the old house by Mrs. Boxholder to suit modern tastes, and her ideas as to what a reception-room of the Lady of Drumduskie should be.

Presently Mrs. Boxholder returned into the hall, and said to Theresa, 'I should like to know the reason why you are not in receipt of a pension.'

'Mr. Pamphlet knew the reason, and was quite satisfied. But I am not sure that I have any claim on Government, as my husband left the navy.'

'Oh!' exclaimed the lady, 'that was it. That did not occur to me. He left it voluntarily, of course.'

'Perfectly voluntarily.'

'And he was a gentleman by birth?'

'He was.'

'Well, I hope all will be well. I relied on my father, who is a most admirable man, and who, I have no doubt, would send me no one objectionable, though I own I was surprised that Mrs. Curgenven made no reply when I wrote to her. She does not know you, I suppose.'

'I believe that on one occasion she saw me—know me she certainly does not.'

'Well, we will hope for the best. You must be very particular about the girls being tidy. Flora has a way of coming down late for prayers, and scrambling through her dressing, and not always using her toothbrush; you must see to that. Rose is wonderfully clever at everything but self-adornment. I have had to complain repeatedly of holes in her stockings. Now you are here, mind, plenty of toothbrush for Flora, and no stocking-holes for Rose. By the way, it was a long and expensive journey. I suppose you must be hungry. I'll have in some tea. Oh! and perhaps you would like to see your room. I'll ring and send a maid with you.'

Then Mrs. Boxholder went to her husband.

'Drumduskie, I believe it is right. Her husband left the navy. That is why there is no widow's pay. I'll send for her luggage. I did not on purpose order a trap to meet her; it is as well at once to impress it on a new-comer that she is to take a subservient place—must expect to be overlooked. It produces an effect at once, without a word, you understand, Drumduskie.'

'Quite so, my dear; no one understands the art of snub better than yourself.'

'You are very rude. It is particularly hard to get people to know their places. You, for instance, need continual reminders to occupy your proper position. Some folks have to be poked up, others to be thrust down.'

Theresa was shown to her bedroom. There was no fire burning in the grate—none was laid. None apparently had been laid in it, or certainly kindled, since the grate was put in, for the fire-bricks at the back were not blackened.

The room was not uncomfortable. It looked to the north, and had a small window. It was furnished with everything that was necessary and nothing beyond, save a bookcase, in which were books of old divinity—Blair's Sermons, Leighton on St. Peter, and a few dreary memoirs of very dull good men, who never did anything interesting in their lives, who never did anything at all, to judge from their biographies, except write letters full of piety, written under the sense that they were some day to be published.

Theresa seated herself on the bed, and waited for her box to arrive. She was tired and discouraged. The phase of life on which she was entering seemed to her the worst with which experience had made her acquainted. There was no help for it, she must remain at Drumduskie to be browbeaten by this woman, to be made to work as a slave. She could not leave; she had no money to carry her anywhere, and wherever she went she must do something to earn her bread. Was one way much worse than another, now that the artistic career was closed to her? In that artistic career, along with much that was objectionable there was change, there was a certain freedom, and there was enthusiasm for art to carry her along. In this occupation she had undertaken there might, indeed, be interests if her pupils were attractive girls, with warm hearts and well-developed intelligences. If they were apt to learn she would find an interest in teaching, if they were ready to love she would find a delight in gaining their affection.

She must avoid Mrs. Boxholder as much as possible. The lady was a bustling person, who would probably have much to occupy her, and that would keep her out of the school-room.

Theresa recalled the strange proposal of Mr. Percival Curgenven through the carriage-window, and did not know what to make of it. Was he in earnest, or was it 'chaff'? He had lived much in the far West—gone cattle-ranching, gold digging; he had mixed with all kinds of persons in the Western States, and had fallen into an offhand, rollicking manner; he said things he meant seriously in a joking manner, and he made his jokes without a muscle moving—what he meant Theresa did not know. She placed no great confidence in his sincerity when he spoke. If he really did wish her hand, he would write. If he did not write then she might conclude that what he shouted through the window was a bit of his nonsense. She put the thought of Percival from her mind, to think only of her present position, and of the duties she had undertaken.

Weary with her long journey, and sick and faint with hunger, she sank on the bed and fell asleep. She was awakened by the maid and the groom entering with her box.

'Here you are, miss, and please—when you've tidied yourself a bit, your hair, and washed—missus says you are to come down to tea.'

Theresa, stupid with sleep, raised her head from the pillow and said, 'I want nothing.'

'Lor!' exclaimed the maid; 'if missus says you are to eat, eat you must. No one here can do what they like; they must do what missus orders, so clean yourself a bit and come down.' The groom had left the room.

'Lor! you poor creetur,' said the maid. 'Well, now, if you haven't been crying! And you've a bad arm. Come, give me the key, and I'll unpack your box for you, missus notwithstanding, who said I wasn't to do nothing of the kind, so as you mightn't come to expect to be waited upon.'

CHAPTER XIX.

IN A SITUATION.

Next day Theresa made acquaintance with her pupils. Of these Rose, the elder, was supposed by her mother, and supposed herself, to be highly accomplished. She was to be finished. Flora, the younger, was admitted to be backward, and to need teaching from the rudiments. Rose was, her mother bade Theresa observe, a beauty of a striking and exceptional character. She was, in fact, not bad-looking, but to an unprejudiced eye would not be accounted beautiful. She had her mother's nose; she was supercilious, and did not believe that anything she could be taught would improve her—anything, that is to say, which a forty pound governess could teach. A music-master at a guinea a lesson might give her a hint that would improve her touch, and a Parisian governess at a hundred per annum might assist her in acquiring fluency in French. Theresa found that her attempts to instruct Rose were received with stolid contempt. Rose played the piano without feeling, she sang out of tune, her French pronunciation was execrable, and she knew nothing of Italian or German, and because she knew nothing of these languages held their literature to be sovereignly stupid, and entirely beneath consideration.

Flora was in face like her father, sandy of hair, irregular of feature, with more flesh on her face than bone and muscle. She was an uninteresting child, listless in manner, unintelligent, and though not unamiable, yet incapable of appreciating affection. She was obedient, but gave little promise of her studies leading to any other result than the exhaustion of the powers and patience of her teacher. Rose, Theresa found, was ready to be actively disagreeable; Flora to be passively uninteresting.

The weather was wet. The rain had come on during the night, and a steady downpour lasted all day.

The governess and children had luncheon with Mr. and Mrs. Boxholder in the dining-room at one o'clock. After lunch the lady of the house told Rose to be ready to drive with her that afternoon to pay a few obligatory visits.

'You, Mrs. Lambert, will take Flora out for a walk.'

'In the rain?' asked Theresa.

'We always take constitutionals in this family, whatever the weather be. You have, of course, an umbrella?'

'Yes, I have one.'

'And a waterproof?'

'I am sorry to say I have not.'

'Then you will be wet through. No one should come to Scotland without a waterproof. Knowledge is only to be acquired by experience. After a sousing rain in Perthshire, and getting wet to the bone, you will remember to the end of your life to have a waterproof with you when you come to Scotland. I make a point of my children taking exercise every day, for an hour at least. Let me see, you do not know the country. Suppose you go as far as the Seven Dubs. Flora—the Seven Dubs to-day; you will show your governess the way; and tell me on your return what observable things you have seen in the hedges, in the sky, on the road. Remember the story of "Eyes and no Eyes." Mrs. Lambert, you will direct the child's attention to everything that may improve her mind and ought to arrest her attention and quicken observation, to everything that may be encountered *en route* to Seven Dubs and back—except, of course, men.'

The carriage was driven to the front door to receive Mrs. Boxholder and her eldest daughter. The former was in the hall before Rose had come down.

'Mrs. Lambert,' said the lady, 'you will see I always take Miss Boxholder about with me. I cannot trust her with any one whom I do not know and on whom I cannot rely. You know she is so very attractive—such a beauty; and there are all sorts of persons about the roads—people from the South, tourists, and what not, concerning whom one knows nothing; and a lively girl and an heiress—for she will inherit Drumduskie, as well as her father's wealth from other sources—must be guarded most carefully. Some day or other, perhaps, I may let her go out a walk with you—not to-day. You will remember to cultivate the mind and form the taste of Miss Flora on your constitutional.'

When Mrs. Boxholder had driven off with Rose, Theresa stood in the porch looking despondingly at the rain, holding her small umbrella in the only hand she could use. She had a light lady's cloak, too light to resist the rain.

Then Mr. Boxholder appeared in the hall, looking about him.

'Miss Lambert,' said he, 'I cannot really permit you to get drenched. Of course you must take the hour's walk, as my wife has ordered it; but you positively must wear some protection against the weather. I think—perhaps I might venture—I am sure my wife has got a waterproof, and I have no doubt we can get it shaken out and dried before she returns, and so she will know nothing about it having been used.'

'Oh, thank you most kindly,' said Theresa. 'I should not venture to put on anything of hers without her permission.'

'Perhaps you are right. Yes. It would be awkward were it not dried in time and hung up in its accustomed place, and she were to discover—upon my word I don't know what we should do. Now consider this. I have a light waterproof overcoat. It won't in the least matter your wearing that. No one will be on the road—not a carter, even—in this detestable weather. Will you excuse me, and put on my overcoat? 'Pon my word it won't look amiss, and it will keep you dry as snuff.'

'Really, Mr. Boxholder, you are most kind; but——'

'But, positively it does my heart good to be called plain Boxholder, and not lairded and Drumdruskied. You won't?—well, go out in this rain unprotected you shall not. Let me see! The gig umbrella! no, that is too heavy for you to hold up. I have it, my tartan—the Drumduskie plaid excogitated by her ladyship. Spread it out and use it as a shawl. Bless you! if she does see it has been rained upon she'll be as pleased as Punch, thinking I have been out figuring in my tartan. She'll never fancy you wore it. And I'll take a turn afterwards round the garden in it, and then, with a white conscience, swear I wore it.'

The good-natured cornfactor would take no refusal: he enveloped Theresa in the plaid.

'There,' said he, 'that's first-rate. Don't you be afraid that Flora will peach. Not she. She's too much afraid of mammy; ain't you, Flora?'

Then back into his smoking-room dived Drumduskie, and Theresa and her pupil sallied forth into the rain.

It was not possible through the veil of descending raindrops to see anything of the landscape, or much in the hedges, on which to comment for the illumination and nutriment of the pupil's mind; and of travellers along the road there were none.

'What are the Seven Dubs?' asked Theresa.

'I don't know,' answered Flora.

'But you know where they are?'

'Yes—I think so.'

'Are there seven anythings there?'

'I'm sure I don't know. But please, Mrs. Lambert, don't ask me questions. Mamma said I was to inquire of you, and not be put off, she said, by being questioned myself.'

Days and weeks passed at Drumduskie. Days not always wet; but fair as well as wet, all went in the house in the same routine of lessons, meals, and walks. Flora was catechized by her mother every few days, and then Theresa was lectured by her on the disappointment occasioned by the slow progress made by the unfortunate child.

'The talents are there,' said Mrs. Boxholder, tapping the low dull brow of the girl; 'they have to be brought out. That is your work. That is what is expected of you, Mrs. Lambert. She is a Drumduskie, and therefore cannot be a fool, and no folly, I can assure you, comes to her from the Pamphlets. The Pamphlets are a remarkably active-minded family. No—

the faculties are locked in the child, and what we want is to have them drawn out. I am sorry that so far, somehow, you do not seem to have hit on the right system, or have gone the wrong way to work—Flora does not seem to me to have got on a bit.'

Again and again did Theresa ask herself whether it would be possible for her to endure the slavery in this house for an entire twelvemonth. She was forced to exercise over herself the greatest control when her blood boiled up at the insolence of the woman who was mistress of the place. The poor girl Flora cowered before her mother—was worried by her into stupidity or sullenness. She really had few abilities, unhappily she had no more lovableness in her than exists in a bit of putty; yet Mr. Boxholder loved best this his youngest, and sought occasion to show her fondness, unobserved by his wife, who rebuked him when she detected him with Flora, as spoiling the girl, and distracting her mind from her lessons. There was no escape possible for Theresa—she had no money, and must remain at Drumduskie, and endure what was put on her, till she had earned sufficient to enable her to leave. She had, moreover, more than half engaged to stay the twelvemonth with the Boxholders when an arrangement had been made relative to her going there.

A month passed before a line reached her from Mr. Percival Curgenven, and that was a mere apology for not having returned the borrowed five shillings earlier. The matter had escaped his recollection, he said, owing to the press of affairs on his attention consequent on his entering on possession of the estate. He did enclose a post-office order for a crown, and for a crown only. He had apparently forgotten his offer of three hundred pounds, and also his offer of himself.

The receipt of this letter a little disappointed Theresa. She was too sensible to allow that she had a right to feel real disappointment, and yet under the depressing atmosphere of Drumduskie this did somewhat weigh on her spirits. She had built no sort of hopes on the offer that had been made her, but she felt that she had a right to be hurt at the frivolous and inconsiderate manner in which she had been treated—an offer made her, flung through a carriage-window, and he who made the offer never troubling himself to know whether it were accepted or not, and apparently not himself concerning whether it had been taken seriously or as a joke.

After a while Theresa was able to use her left arm again.

The nearest surgeon was called in to advise when she might discard the sling. 'But you understand,' said Mrs. Boxholder, 'he will send in his account for professional attendance to you, Mrs. Lambert. We do not pay the bills of our governesses, or they would be always shamming sickness, and running up tremendous accounts. They cost us enough as it is.'

Some trouble arose occasionally from Mr. Boxholder being discovered in the school-room, or from his exchanging a few words with Theresa, whom he insisted on designating *Miss*, though corrected repeatedly by his wife. He went into the school-room to see his favourite child, kiss her and encourage her; and he spoke to Theresa when he had an opportunity, out of kindliness of heart. At table at meals he might not look across at her, or in any other direction than his wife, or address any observations to Theresa. To do so provoked unpleasantnesses.

Theresa was surprised at first to find that the servants in the house were English. By degrees the reason came out. Mrs. Boxholder so worried her domestics that no Scotch girls would remain with her, and she was obliged to obtain her servants from England, and from a great distance, so as to ensure their remaining in their places. By this means she had them at her mercy, or, to be more correct, at her disposal, for at least six months, owing to the expense of the return journey to England. The two girls, Rose and Flora, had, moreover, gone through the hands of a succession of governesses, who had had the moulding of them each for a very brief space; either Mrs. Boxholder had made life at Drumduskie unendurable to the ladies, and they had thrown up the situation, or the lady had bundled them off because they did not prove tractable under her objurgations. The systems under which the girls had been taught varied with their governesses. One held by 'Mangnall's Questions' and Blair's 'Compendium of the Sciences'; another followed the last approved methods of the schools. One grounded and another topped; one went upon the system of making all instruction palatable, teaching history through James's and Scott's Novels, and geography through imaginary voyages; another by reducing all instruction to bare bones, making of it a hard list of names and dates and unpalatable and indigestible facts.

Theresa found that the fresh air of Scotland was restoring her strength, her spirits, and that vigour of mind which had carried her through her life hitherto, but which had given way temporarily under sickness and disappointment. Her blood began to circulate faster, her eye resumed its fire, and as her health was restored, with it came a combative spirit that ill-brooked the overbearing manners of Mrs. Boxholder. That lady little knew how nearly she drove her governess to an outbreak; but Theresa had acquired self-control in her professional career, and she was able to restrain herself under provocation, and await her own convenience for leaving Drumduskie. She was well aware that if she departed before six months were up Mrs. Boxholder would withdraw from her salary the sum that the journey had cost from Liskeard to Perth.

CHAPTER XX.

ALICE.

Justinian Curgenven experienced none of those vexations, in taking possession of the Curgenven estate, that marred the satisfaction of his father. He was not called upon for subscriptions, nor harassed for repairs. No one wanted him to speak at political meetings, and take the chair at missionary gatherings. He was as much courted as a prince, and felt all his consequence as heir-apparent to the principality of Curgenven. Justinian had never thought disparagingly of himself, and now he was inclined to consider himself very highly indeed. He tossed his head, walked erect, was a little more careful about his dress—not to run about with his boot-strings untied, nor out-at-elbows. He cocked his cap consequentially, and stalked in the middle of the road. For the first few days Justinian was perfectly happy, as there was novelty in the situation, and variety in the objects presented to his eyes. What formerly he had looked at with curiosity, but had never been suffered to touch by Mrs. Curgenven, he now handled freely. Portions of the house to which he had never been invited he explored at will. But after a few days he began to feel bored. He had not fitted into the new surroundings so as to feel comfortable in them. He lounged in a chair and yawned. He pulled down book after book in the library, and found them alike old dull stuff. He gravitated to his father, his wonted companion, and found his father's time taken up with business. The hilarity and offhandedness of Mr. Percival were gone; he was fagged, vexed, uneasy, and the boy's humour took the same tinge of discouragement. Curgenven was large and splendid, but the Pill-box was cosy. 'After all,' thought Mr. Percival, 'on my hundred and fifty I was jollier in the Pill-box.' Justinian had not reached this depth of repining, but he began to admit that he regretted the free-and-easy, slouching, sufficient-unto-the-day life in the Pill-box.

Unkind to Justinian Mrs. Curgenven had never been. She had felt interest in the boy, and regret that his education had been neglected. She had spoken to his father on this matter. Mr. Percival readily admitted that Justinian had not been kept to his books, nor taught submission to control. But this admission led to no results. Percival did not fret himself over his son's deficiencies, and he took no active steps to rectify what he knew was amiss.

Mrs. Curgenven had never liked Percival, but she had never quarrelled with him. She was a woman of strict views as to the conduct of life, and her own ways were orderly in accordance with her principles. The easy indifference of Percival offended her. In her opinion, he exaggerated into defects the weaknesses of her husband. Lambert, if left to her, might have been kept in order, but he broke away from restraint and relapsed under the influence of his cousin. She had not openly discouraged the visits of Percival to Curgenven, but she had received him without warmth when he came, and had expressed no wish to see him again when he left. Her manner towards him had been civil and distant.

Now that Percival was squire of Curgenven Jane kept aloof, partly, perhaps, because it would be painful to her to revisit her former home, where she had been happy; yet Mrs. Curgenven was not the woman to consider her own feelings; the main reason for her abstention was that the negative feeling towards Percival she had entertained in the past was converted into positive aversion since he let her understand that he believed in the marriage of Lambert with Theresa, and that consequently her own position had been equivocal. She resolutely set her face against all inquiry into this matter, as she would have set it against an investigation into the authenticity of the Pentateuch, or into the legitimacy of the authority of the Crown.

When she met Mr. Percival, as she needs must, it was with the same tolerant condescension with which she would have conversed with a Dissenting grocer or a Radical plumber. Percival, by admitting the possibility of a doubt as to her position being morally and legally unassailable, had fallen from that sublime sphere in which she moved, and in which were her convictions. She could stoop to speak with those who belonged to an inferior order of beings, but such converse must be carried on upon conditions. Of these there were two —either the member of that inferior order must be carried up in a brief ecstatic trance into her seventh heaven, there to be dazzled by her transcendent glory ; or she must herself descend, and be recognized as graciously descending, also for a brief space, to be a prophet of the truth and angel of revelation to those below.

With Alice, Justinian had been on excellent terms. She was a bright, charming girl, oppressed by her mother, and effervescing with happiness when the pressure was for a while removed. She was delighted to associate with a cousin of about her own age, as she had no companions in the neighbourhood for whom she cared greatly. The independence of Justinian, his self-confidence, his unflagging good-humour, affected her girlish imagination. She was disposed, in rebellious moods, to dispute the reiterated assertion of her mother that the young fellow was uneducated and ignorant as a boor. She admired his readiness of resource, his experimental knowledge of the world and of men, rare in a youth. But, indeed, Justinian's years had been passed in scenes various, and among many strange persons; he was intelligent, he had observed much, and had acquired much from his father's conversation—and his father had knocked about over all the quarters of the globe.

Among the many methods adopted for stunting the intelligence by the directors of education is that of teaching geography by rote. Alice had been required to learn that of the United States in the approved manner. She had acquired a list of cities, states, rivers, mountains, the population of the towns, the altitude of the mountains, and the amount of cubic feet of water rolled down by the rivers. Her head had been stuffed with these solid and uninteresting facts, which happily a healthy and vigorous nature enables children so taught to reject immediately after their examination—as healthy and vigorous stomachs reject unwholesome, indigestible food.

But Justinian had been in the 'States.' He had tarried more or less briefly in several of the towns, could describe them, could tell some incident that had befallen him or his father in them. At once the girl became interested, looked these places out on the map, and never after forgot them or their position. The Cape, New Zealand, China—Mr. Percival Curgenven had been everywhere, and had had droll experiences everywhere, all which had been retailed to his son, and his son retailed them to Alice, who laughed and identified these localities thenceforth.

It was wonderful to her how readily Justinian could calculate, by ways of his own, in his head, and reach a result quicker and with more correctness than could she by rule on the slate.

In a knowledge of history Justinian was deficient. But one rainy day, when he and his father were staying at Curgenven, he had asked Alice to tell him what she knew about the family portraits. Unhappily the traditions had been broken by the transfer of the estate from the old squire to Captain Lambert, so that what she knew she derived partly from stories her father remembered to have been told when he was a child, but chiefly from her mother, who, with somewhat pedantic precision, had remembered what had been told her by Squire Justinian in past days relative to the ancient Curgenvens.

The young Justinian had a tolerably high opinion of his family, and was interested to hear about its past. But he became greatly confused in the history—he could not tell the order in which the English kings came, and was sensible of a little shame when Alice caught him out in an egregious chronological blunder.

'The first portrait we have,' said she, 'is of a Ralph Curgenven in the reign of James I.'

'Yes,' said Justinian, 'I must read up that reign. Of course he did great things in it—fought in the Crusades, no doubt.'

'How can you say such things, Justin? There had been no Crusades since 1270—that under Saint Louis, in which he died at Carthage. James I. of England and VI. of Scotland came to the throne in 1603 and died in 1625.'

'To be sure,' said Justinian abashed. 'But there were Curgenvens before that.'

'Oh, there were Curgenvens of Curgenven before the Conquest!'

'I must read up the Conquest. No doubt they were most important people, and there is lots about them in history.'

'There were Curgenvens before the Heptarchy,' said Alice; 'there must have been—the name is British.'

'I'll grind away at the Heptarchy,' said Justinian.

'I really don't know when there were not Curgenvens,' said Alice.

'I say, lend us your Universal History. I'll have a good sweat at it, and then I shall know exactly where all the Curgenvens come.'

Thus, unconsciously, the two minds acted on each other, each opening the other to new interests. Alice exerted a softening and refining influence on Justinian, whose home was without a woman in it; and to Alice association with her cousin saved her mind from the paralyzing effect of her mother's unremittent drill.

Since his arrival along with his father at the Manor-House Justinian had seen little of his cousin. He had been too much engaged in exploring the house and the stables and gardens to give her a thought. Mrs. Curgenven had not been to the house, and he had not been to the rectory.

At last, believing he had run through the gamut of the novelties, and becoming weary of having nothing to do, with his hands in his pockets Justinian sauntered to the stables—that place to which every idle boy gravitates instinctively. His father was out—the coachman had driven him into Liskeard—so that he knew he would not find him there, but he expected to find the groom, with his coat off and braces relaxed and cast down, sleeves turned up, currycombing a horse or washing a carriage.

No one, however, was in the stable-yard, and Justinian strolled into the stables, and there heard a gentle voice speaking in terms of endearment to a grey pony in the loose-box. Justinian knew the voice at once, and his heart gave a leap. Alice was in the loose-box, coaxing her favourite riding cob, Whinny, and the young fellow went to her at once. If the truth must be told, his delight at hearing her sprang from selfishness. He desired to have some one to talk to, and some variety to the wearisome exploration of the contents of the house.

He found Alice with her arms round the neck of the grey, caressing the beast, with her cheek laid against the head of Whinny, who was content to be fondled by her mistress.

When Justinian entered the loose-box Alice looked up; her eyes were moist. She coloured slightly, tossed back her hair from her face, and said apologetically, 'I ventured here to say good-bye to Whinny.'

'Why say good-bye?'

'Because Whinny is no longer mine. She belongs to you now—so mamma says.'

'Oh, stuff! She has always been yours, Alice. Of course she remains yours.'

'But you will want a cob.'

'Not such a cob as that,' said the boy disdainfully. 'I want a creature fourteen and a half hands high, and with more spirit than the old grey.'

'Thank you, Justin, but I don't fancy we can afford to keep her now.'

'Rubbish! Of course you can. I will keep her here for you if your mother makes any demur. She is always at your service, she is yours, not mine; and as for the bit of grass she eats, and the oats—who thinks any odds of that?'

'You are a good, kind cousin,' said Alice, putting out her hand to him over the back of the cob; 'I shall always feel thankful to you. I didn't want my darling pet to get into bad hands. You will see to that. As to my keeping Whinny, that must be as mamma and grandpapa think. You know grandpapa has a mission woman and a Scripture reader, and so can't also keep a pair. He says if he could do with one only then he might have a second horse, but people might object, and so he is obliged to do with one horse to hack at everything. Perhaps,' considered Alice, 'if he could have a mission child, a ministering angel, that wouldn't cost more than half, then he might allow me to keep a pony. You see the Scripture reader has to deliver tracts, and the cost of the tracts adds to the expense.'

'Come along, Alice,' said Justinian, 'let us go for a ride on the moors. I'm so dull and stupid at the Manor, and papa is away, gone to see old Physic, so I have no one to talk to, and away from the Pill-box, nothing to do.'

'I shall be delighted. Mamma is about collecting pennies from the old women for Anglo-Israel. She says that the subscriptions have got behind since dear papa's death. She could not attend to them for a quarter. But what are you going to ride?'

'My horse has not come yet. Pike is going to get me a beauty, one that will turn over a stone wall without blinking. You ride and I will run by your side. I'll saddle Whinny for you. Never mind the groom.'

All Justinian's good spirits had returned; he laughed and chattered, as he walked beside Alice mounted on her cob. They went out through the gates that led from the grounds and the birch-woods upon the furzy moor. The land rose rapidly, consequently there was no question of Alice putting her pony to the trot and of Justinian running. At her side he kept looking up into her bright face, and making her laugh with his odd sallies.

The fresh air blowing over the moors fluttered Alice's hair about her face, and made her cheeks glow and her eyes sparkle.

'I say, cousin,' said Justinian, 'this is jolly; now I am at the Manor, we shall go about together and see all that is to be seen on the moors.' Then it flashed on him that he had spoken unfeelingly, not considering her loss in the thought of his gain. He became red and confused: 'You know what I mean, Alice, I'm not such a cad as to mean anything that may give you pain. All I want to say is, that I'm awfully glad we are near each other now instead of being as before, nine miles apart.'

'I am quite sure you never intended to say, never thought even, anything but what was kind and courteous.'

'I say, Alice, by George, who is that?'

They had reached a broad sweep of fairly level down, and over this was galloping a girl on the back of a wild moorland pony, without saddle or bridle, astride, directing her horse by a halter, and with shouts. Her hat had fallen between her shoulders and her red hair was flying about her head. She was directing her pony to leap the gorse bushes, and thread its way at a canter among masses of dispersed granite.

'That——?' said Alice. 'Oh, Esther!'

It could be none other.

'To be sure. I thought I had seen her before somewhere.'

CHAPTER XXI.

TOLMENNA.

No sooner did Esther Morideg catch sight of Justinian and Alice Curgenven, than she turned the head of her horse, lashed it with a bunch of furze she held in her left hand, and came plunging toward them over all obstacles, at headlong speed, in a manner impossible with any steed not reared on the rugged granite moors. When she reached them she drew up.

'What are you doing here? Why are you come to the moor?' she asked.

'Esther,' answered Alice, 'may we not visit your kingdom without a passport?'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'I am coming on your own invitation,' said Justinian, 'to see your house and make the acquaintance of your grandfather.'

'Our house you can see, as long as it is ours,' answered the girl, leaping from the back of the horse, withdrawing the halter, and with a cut of the furze bush dismissing the creature from bondage, as an ancient Roman manumitted a slave. 'But gran'fer, he's in prison and don't come out till the end o' the week.'

'In prison!' repeated Justinian.

'Yes,' said the girl, striding along by the side of the boy. 'And I reckon he'll go there ag'in afore long for sum'at better nor last time.'

'What has he done?'

'Oh!' said Esther, putting her hands behind her head, twisting her red gold hair into a knot, then stooping and rending sprigs of heather, and pinning up her locks with them. 'Oh, it's all along o' Lawyer Physic. Gran'fer he knocked 'n down, he did.'

'Why, what had Mr. Physic done?'

'Done—iverything what he oughtn't to ha' done, sure.'

She turned and looked full in Justinian's face. 'I'd like to have thickey fuzz-bush i' my hand, and beat old Physic wi' it, I would, and for sure I wad'n spare him. I'd cut him over the back and right across the face.'

'But what is this all about?'

'It's all about Tolmenna. About what else shu'd it be?'

'Is that your house?'

'Yes, it be—sartain sure, if us can keep it. But Lawyer Physic he sez, sez he, he's gone and bought the land, and is a-going to hev a mine there. I know th' ou'd volks were arter tin hereabout, ages agone. I know it—there be their works, and the pixies' hammers you can hear now i' the adits, and where you hear the pixies at work, there for sartain be a lode.'

'He has bought the land, do you say?'

'I believe the matter stands thus,' said Alice. 'Mr. Physic has purchased some of this moorland, and wants to get up a company to work the tin on it. He has given Roger Morideg notice to quit his cottage.'

'And he's not going to quit,' said Esther, savagely stamping on the short turf. 'Gran'fer, his vayther, he built the house, and gran'fer were a little boy at the time and helped 'n to roll the stones and cut the faran (fern) for the thatch.'

'Then you think the house belongs to you?'

'For sure sartain. Gran'fer's vayther he built 'n. Don't that mak' it his?'

'Not unless the land were his on which he built it.'

'Oh, the land!' said Esther impatiently; 'gran'fer's paid a shillin' every Lady (day) for that, an' he don't deny he'll go on paying—he's never got hindermost i' his paying.'

'Then, Esther,' said Justinian, 'I am sorry for you, but as far as I can see you have no redress. However, I will speak to my father about it—he has, of course, great influence with Mr. Physic—and he will see whether he can prevail on him not to press you to quit.'

'Us won't quit. Us'll stick there like moss to the stoans.'

'But what has that to do with your grandfather's being in prison?' asked the boy.

'Why, gran'fer knocked Lawyer Physic down, when he came to say he'd turn 'n out, and hav' th' ou'd house down.'

'He had no right to lay his hands on him.'

'He didn't, he knocked 'n down wi' a stone; a stone I reckon bean't so soft as is a hand.'

'I am afraid this will create a prejudice against him.'

'He'll knock 'n down wi' sum'at harder nor a stone if he comes here again; and if gran'fer don't, I will.'

'I'll tell you what I will do,' said Alice, 'I'll get my grandfather, the rector, to interfere.'

'I don't want he,' retorted Esther somewhat contemptuously. 'I know very well what he'll do. He'll go and give six very good reasons for Roger be in his right, and then he'll turn about and give half-a-dozen why Lawyer Physic be all i' his right; and then he'll go away thinking he's a peacemaker and the blessing on peacemakers be his—and he's left the muddle jist where he found it, not a bit and crumb better. But, there, I niver meant to say nothing to cross you, Miss Alice, us be too good friends for that. Gran'mother sez as some volks be good granite and some volks be elvan, and some be tin.'

'What is elvan?' asked Justinian.

'Elvan! I thought every fool knowed that. Elvan be a sort o' stone as is no good at all, goes to powder, but where elvan be there be tin, for sure sartain. You can't do nothing wi' elvan; 'tain't builder's stone, 'tain't metal, but it be between the two, and no good for naught but to say that where it be, there be tin. I reckon Pass'n Pamphlet be elvan. If you want to find this or that, you mun look o' one side o' him or t'other.'

'Well, never mind about my grandfather,' said Alice, somewhat annoyed, but also not a little amused, for children and the ignorant take the measure of a man and discover his weaknesses with marvellous acuteness; 'what is to be done with regard to Tolmenna?'

'Knock Lawyer Physic on the head,' said Esther with confidence, 'and do't better next time than did gran'fer wi' a stone. I reckon,' she added with a laugh, 'he knocked 'n wi' a bit o' elvan by mistake.'

'You should not harbour such thoughts, Esther,' said Alice gravely.

'Why not? He'd turn us out o' our house as gran'fer and his ou'd vayther builded, and where I've a lived a' my life, and I love every stone o' it—every stone as he'd tear down.' Then defiantly, 'I don't care if I do it. Nobody never would catch me and put me i' prison. I could run and hide. I know these moors, and there's scores and scores o' places for hiding. Why, looky' here.'

She pointed. They had reached a depression in the surface of the moor between two eminences, there were heaps and hollows in a line from the highest point to the bottom of the valley. 'See! all this the ou'd volks ha' streamed for tin, and they've made their adits and their levels, and it's a reg'lar rabbit-burrow to them as knows it.'

The moor was furrowed as though it had at one time been subject to the rush of furious torrents at the melting of masses of snow. This was now all, or nearly all, clothed with scanty turf and dense grey moss, and the stones were so belichened as to assimilate with the moss in one tone of silvery grey.

'Look here,' said Esther. 'I know well what the old men did. First they grubbed the elvan after tin as far as they could down wi'out going underground. Do'y see now where their works be? Well, then they got a bit boulder, and they sunk prospectin' pits. Thickey there be one.' She pointed to a hollow like a pock-mark in the face of the moor, but with a grass-covered heap thrown up on the lower side of it. 'They dug down there, till they hit a lode, and then they went bouldly on after it for a way, and then they got feared they was too long i' the dark, and up they worked to the light again. Look! There's one of the places they came up at. There's most o' these here prospectin' holes be choked up wi' rummage. But there be some as I knows as bean't. I can go down 'n and run along underground—like a rabbit or a rat, and nobody could niver find me—and come up just when I'd a mind to.'

In another moment the house was reached. It was a low one-storey erection of the rudest description; great granite unshaped blocks piled one on another, bedded in clay and moss; no mortar had been used. The walls were thick—six feet, rudely faced outward and inward, and filled in with rubble in the middle. A brush of whitewash had been given to the door-jambs, and to the window-frames. The roof was thatched with ferns only, or ferns and turf together, and was nearly as thick as the walls; it was supported on massive oak rafters. A high wall or hedge of stones enclosed a space before the cottage, cutting off all prospect and excluding much sun; but such walls were erected to screen the fronts of houses from wind and rain, as well as to protect them from invasion by the half-wild horses and cattle that roamed the moors, and which, in stormy weather, or out of wanton curiosity, unless kept at a distance, would drive their heads through windows, and thrust themselves wholly in at doors.

The cottage interior was gloomy; the entrance was not immediately into the sitting-room, but into a sort of stable occupied by poultry, a cow, a rude cart, and a number of old barrels and more or less fragmentary articles of husbandry. A side door by a granite step admitted to the kitchen-chamber. In this room there was a ceiling of boards, and below the boards the entire surface was ribbed with rods, extending the width of the apartment, fastened to the rafters, and this rack that occupied the superficies constituted the wardrobe, store-closet, and treasury of the household. Guns, tools, garments, boots, shoes, groceries, were immediately overhead, reached readily by the hand, as the room was but six feet high. No drier or more accessible spot could have been desired, and such contrivances were general on the moors till of late years. In the moist atmosphere goods thus held aloft overhead were kept from moth and mildew, and became impregnated with peat smoke, that gave them a peculiar colour and savour.

On entering the room, which was unoccupied, Justinian and Alice could at first discern little after having been out in the full glare of day. But by degrees their eyes became accustomed to the dusk, and then Justinian exclaimed, as he pointed to a line hanging by the great fire-place, into which feathers were knotted, 'Why, what in the name of wonder is this?'

Esther went up to the line. It was composed of black wool, white and brown thread entwined, and at every two or three inches was looped about a bunch of cock's or pheasant's or moorhen's feathers, set alternately. The line had been fastened to the rail overhead, and a low stool was at the hearth-stone below it; the plaiter of the chain was away, and the web was incomplete. Esther laughed.

'This be a witch-ladder,' she said. 'Gran'mother be a making on't. Her don't hold wi' gran'fer's ways, knocking volk about the head wi' a stone. Her say, "Leave it to me, and I'll finish 'em my way." I reckon thickey witch-ladder be a-made for Lawyer Physic.'

'And what will Lawyer Physic do with it when he gets it?' asked the boy.

'He'll never get it, but it'll get him,' answered Esther. 'Do'y mean to tell me you don't know what a witch-ladder be? Lor'-a-mussy—what be the good o' schules when it leaves scholards so tottle ignorant? I'll telly what it be. Her hev' wove and knotted into thickey ladder every ill her can mention. There be every kind o' pains and aches in they knots and they feathers; and when gran'mother hev' done the ladder her'll tie a stone to the end and sink it i' Dosmare Pool, and ivery ill wish ull find a way, one after the other, to the j'ints and bones, and head and limbs, o' Lawyer Physic. See if they don't.'

'Oh, Esther!' exclaimed Alice, shocked at what she heard. 'This is as wicked as it is to strike Mr. Physic with a stone.'

'Why is it?' asked the girl defiantly. 'He's got his money and his law, and the perlice to do for him what he likes, and what hev' we poor folks got? I reckon us must help ourselves as best us can, if not wi' moor-stones, then wi' ill wishes tied into witch-ladders.'

'It is ridiculous,' said Justinian. 'I shouldn't mind any number of witch-ladders being woven for me, but I would be spared the cobble-stones.'

'You shall have neither on 'em, never,' exclaimed Esther; 'never naught but good wishes and kind will—there, I swear that, my young squire.' She laid hold of him with both her hands and shook him in a friendly mood.

'But really, Esther,' persisted the young fellow, 'I cannot understand any human being who pretends to have reason believing in such rubbish.'

'You say that—you!' exclaimed the girl, again shaking him, but in a less friendly manner. 'What 'ud you be if gran'mother hadn't a-turned her apron?'

Justinian liberated himself, and burst into laughter.

'Aye!' said Esther, somewhat angrily, 'you may laugh, but it be true as daylight. Gran'mother were angered wi' Mrs. Curgenven, and her shooked off her good luck from her and turned all her luck backsyforemost. And from that hour everything hev' gone again' her. The lady be cast out of the house, has lost her husband, and you and your father be in her place. My gran'mother did that. Ask Mrs. Curgenven—ask Miss Alice if it weren't so.' Then, conscious that she had struck on a painful subject, she added, 'See what an ill thing it be, when the good luck be turned off one it be turned off from others as well. Gran'mother niver meant no harm by you, Miss Alice, niver; but when her tooked the good days away from your mother, her couldn't do other but take the sunlight away from you too; but I'll make all well to once if I can.'

Justinian was conscious that the change in the fortunes of Alice and her mother was an unpleasant topic—must be distressing for his cousin to hear commented on, and he endeavoured to divert the thoughts of Esther once more to the ladder.

'Now, Esther, can you, as a rational being, look me in the face, and say that you believe in such stuff as this lot of twist and feathers doing any one harm?'

'Aye, I can,' replied the girl with assurance, and she fixed her large brown lustrous eyes on his. 'It's in reason. Don't gran'mother knot an ill wish into every loop her make wi' the veathers? And don't the threefold cord hold 'em together?

And where else be they if they bain't there? Then when the ladder be down i' Dosmare Pool, as the water unlooses and rots the ties, up comes the wishes, one after the other, and away they goes right on end to Lawyer Physic. I've a-zeed un comin' up scores o' times. You can zee 'em yourself. Go to Dosmare Pool and look into the water, and you'll zee there'll come up a soort o' bubble, and when her gets to the top her's gone—them is the ill wishes other volks ha' tied in the witch-ladders they've let down there. And when gran'mother ha' done her'n and let'n down, you'll see her wishes, as the knots loose, come up just the same way.'

Justinian was provoked at the ignorance and superstition of the girl, but he let her speak on that she might not recur to the former topic. However, she went back to it nevertheless, for she said, 'But that's naught to do wi' the ill luck gran'mother sent to Mrs. Curgenven, and that has come on her heavier nor ever gran'mother minded it should. But as it canna be ondone what ha' happ'd, see if I canna make better for what is to come. Do'y know why this house be called Tolmenna?—no, I reckon not; but I've heard gran'fer say that in the old Cornish tongue it mean'd the Great Stone wi' a hole through 'n, and sure enough there her be in the linney. You go round,' she said to Justinian, 'by the outzide till tha come to the great stone set up on end in the wall. You'll zee the hole sure enough, but her's stopped wi' a whisp o' hay. I'll pull 'n out.'

Justinian left the house as directed.

The stone in question was easily found; it stood up, a slab of granite some nine feet high and eight or nine wide, and in it, about three feet above the soil, a circular hole had been artificially but rudely cut through it.

Esther had brought Alice into the outbuilding that served as ante-chamber to the house proper, and going to the back drew away a wad of hay, and the light and air poured in through the orifice.

'Now,' said the girl to Justinian, who stood without, 'thrust in your hand.'

He put his arm through, as commanded.

'And you, Miss Alice, take the young squire's hand.'

Alice, much amused, and to humour the wild girl, did as she was bidden.

Then Esther, tearing open her collar, drew from her neck a coral chain over her head, and she wound it about their united hands.

'I've heard gran'mother say,' she said, standing by their bound hands, 'as in the ou'd ancient time the volk used to do this and was married thereby fast as heaven and airth cu'd make 'em. And I've made you double fast, I have, wi' my pixy chain. You're one afore heaven above and airth beneath, and a' the pixies as well, so I've mended what was amiss, and you'll get back again to Curgenven, and get the young squire too.'

Then suddenly, moved by a new impulse, she withdrew the chain and ran away—ran from the cottage, fled among the rocks, threw herself down in a hidden nook, and tossed from side to side in a storm of tears.

CHAPTER XXII.

A REBELLION.

Mr. Percival Curgenven sat in the study. A good many houses have rooms so designated, though never used for that concentration of thought which is implied by the name. Captain Lambert had preferred his smoking-room in the bungalow as a quiet retreat to which he could retire, and where he could lounge and enjoy his cigar, and let his thoughts drift to and fro as sea-weed in chopping waves in a vortex of currents. All business he had thrown off himself upon the shoulders of agent and wife. Now Mr. Percival had discovered that much came upon him, the consideration of which he was not in a position to devolve on others. And chief of this was that day-and-night-mare of all housekeepers, the servants.

Percival had thought that he was freed from solicitude on this head when he constituted his faithful old factotum at the Pill-box, Bathsheba Trefry, housekeeper in Curgenven. She was severely conscientious, grim, but good-natured towards children and animals. In the Pill-box she had not been brought into relation with other servants, as the only assistant kept there was a temporary charwoman. She had acted as Percival's housekeeper, cook, parlour- and chamber-maid at Liskeard, and must accordingly know the several duties appertaining to these separate offices. None could therefore be better calculated to superintend the several servants who would relieve her of these duties. She was a strict woman, and would be able to keep the younger servants in order. But the domestics whom Percival found in the house, and whom he, ignorant and inexperienced in such matters, had engaged to remain on, rose in revolt. Mrs. Bounce, the cook, Mr. Tombs, the butler, Charles, the fair and feeble footman, Mary Jane, the upper housemaid, and Rose-Anne, the under-housemaid, and Thomas, the boot-and-shoe boy, were indignant and resolved not to endure this elevation over their heads of 'an old frump,' and the cook told Mrs. Trefry as much in forcible terms, not sparing her the frumpish designation. Bathsheba appealed to her master, and Mr. Percival, in sanguine spirit, sent for the cook into his study, believing that a word from him would oil and allay the troubled waters. But he was doomed to discover that such domestic storms are not to be appeased by a drop of good advice; that the interference of the master works the storm into a hurricane.

Mrs. Bounce, who appeared red in the face and puffing, had assumed an air of defiance before she entered the study, and had fortified her resolution to brave the master by that means to which cooks are supposed not infrequently to have recourse.

She listened with lack-lustre eye and pursed-up lips to what Mr. Percival had to say, and then, suddenly, the torrent of her words poured forth. She commented on the ridiculous figure Mrs. Trefry cut with her antiquated dress, on her manner of doing up her hair, on her sniffing, on the tone of her voice and the texture of her skin, on the baseness of her character in having served for twelve pounds—in an incautious moment Bathsheba had let out this damning fact—on the gross and unpardonable insult offered to herself, a lady who condescended for forty pounds to see that the kitchen-maid did all her dirty work, in having pitchforked above her a person, a creature, who had served as maid-of-all-work on twelve pounds. Mrs. Bounce would tell Mr. Curgenven what she thought of Mrs. Trefry, how she was disposed to designate her—she was an old frump, and when that was said she had said all. Nevertheless Mrs. Bounce did not show that she had said all when she had employed that expletive. That woman had 'the imperence to give herself hairs over her, a woman as knowed nothing of what a gentleman's cook ought to be.'

Mr. Curgenven had sprung up, unable to endure further the rush of the cook's words; he caught her by the shoulders, spun her round, and thrust her through the study door. Mrs. Bounce was not silenced by this means; she raised her voice to a higher pitch, she shouted in the hall, on the stairs: 'As how *she* had been accustomed to be in gentlemen's establishments, and she wouldn't demean herself by staying another hour in an 'ouse where there was a master as didn't know how to be'ave himself to ladies, who was bringing in all the rag and bobtail acquaintance of his beggar days to fill the place of respectable servants. She knowed, she did, 'ow as Mr. Percival 'ad 'eld his 'at for the twopences the captain 'ad chucked to him. She knowed as he 'ad 'ad nothing to live on but what the captain 'ad given 'im. She snapped her fingers in his face, and when she'd got 'er wages, she'd go off direct, and never trouble 'im for a char-acter,' and so on and so on.

Mr. Curgenven rang the bell.

The butler entered.

'Send for the policeman to remove that woman,' said Percival, fuming with rage.

Instead of replying, the butler shut the door behind him, assumed an unbutlerian expression of face, and said, 'I beg your pardon, sir, but I want to know if I shall forfeit a month's wages if I go at once, or whether I shall be forced to remain my four weeks, which 'ud be unpleasant to all parties. I'd rayther go, sir, with my wage in my pocket than stay and break the decanter, and run my helbow through the plate-glass window, and let the barrel of ale run to waste, all of which might happen if I was forced to remain for my wage till this day month. At the same time, sir, I'm open to an arrangement. I don't mind, to oblige you, sir, staying on till I find another place as will suit me, if you'll be good enough to send that old woman, Mrs. Trefry, about her business.'

'Most certainly not. Go and be hanged! You've given me notice—pack at once.'

'My wages, sir—I'm content to stay if——'

'Get out of my sight!'

The butler darted back as Mr. Curgenven caught up a square ruler and, whisking it over his head, made as though he would throw it at him. He slammed the library door after him as a declaration of hostilities, much as a man-of-war discharges a gun across the bows of a vessel that belongs to a rival power to bid her stand and engage. Then in burst, without knocking, the upper and under housemaids, their bosoms heaving, and both speaking together.

'They wanted to know whether Mr. Curgenven had ordered that they was to sleep together? They'd always been accustomed to have separate rooms and beds, as was the way in all *gentlemen's* houses, but Mrs. Trefry had gone and said as how that she didn't see why there should be such a lot of servants' rooms occupied, and that they was to have one room between 'em. 'Twasn't as how Jane had any fault to find with Rose-Anne, nor had Rose-Anne any fault to find with Mary Jane, but a principle was involved. Where was it all to end? Would Mr. Curgenven come and look at the room, and measure it, and see if there were accommodation enough for them two? And what did Mrs. Trefry mean by giving them a bit of yellow soap, when they had always been accustomed to Almond Cream? Would Mr. Curgenven try the soap himself and see if it were fitting for their skins? Had Mr. Curgenven authorized Mrs. Trefry to bid them mend the muslin blind at the window that was tore? And if so, which was to do it? It wasn't Jane's place, and it wasn't Rose's place. And if one of them must do it, would he find them the cotton and needle, and a thimble? and not object if his room were not tidied for twenty-four hours, nor his bed made? They couldn't do everything. If they was to do his room, how could they run the tear in the muslin blind? And if they was forced like slaves to mend the blind, how was his room to be done? They would like to know——'

Mr. Curgenven put his hands to his ears and ran round his library table, till the maids unable to obtain satisfaction retired in wrath and disgust. Then Percival threw himself down in his arm-chair, and dropping his hands by his side, said, 'I wish I were back in the Pill-box.'

He was not left quiet many minutes before Bathsheba burst in, in livid rage, dragging in the boot-and-knife boy by the arm.

'Master!' gasped she, 'look at this idle toad! There's the pore pigs ha' been and never had no meat these three days—and they're a-squallin' their very lungs away. I told him he was to take the kitchen waste to the sty, instead of Keziah—everything is put on that girl—he does naught but loaf about, and he said he wouldn't. He didn't say it outright to me, or I'd ha' boxed his donkey ears; but he said it to Keziah, and I stopped her as she was trundling a barrow full o' potato parings and throwed away apples, and crusts of bread, and remains o' tarts and puddings, and soups as have turned sour, and lots of butter and cream, and jam and cake, and pickles and fat meat, and what not—all for the pigs. I said she wasn't to take it, and a sin and a shame it is that so much should go to the pigs, and I said that this idle young toad was to feed the pigs, and he hasn't done it; and they've been starving these three days—all because of him; and there's like to be a summons took out against you, sir, for cruelty to animals—all because of this lazy Tom.'

'I don't care,' said the sullen boy. ''Tain't my place. I've passed the fourth standard. 'Tain't decent as I should mind pigs'

'And then, master!' pursued the irate housekeeper, 'the pigs' trough is chock-full of dirt of all kinds—broken best service dishes (I saw a well-dish cracked and throwed there)—and I picked a silver teaspoon with the crest on it out of the muck, and there's cinders and pigs' bedding and all kinds o' dirt in their trough. And that's not been cleaned out for months, and the sty be over knee-deep in filth, no bedding of clean straw for the pore beasts. I told this jackanapes he was to clean 'em out, and he says it's no business of his.'

'I don't care,' said the sulky boy, ''tain't for fourth standards to soil their hands wi' pigs.'

'If you can't do your work you shall go,' said Mr. Curgenven.

'I don't care,' retorted the lad; 'vayther said I wasn't to stay if I didn't like the place. I can get a clerkship in the Bank o' England I reckon. I've gone through the fourth standard.'

'Yes—let him go, master,' said the old woman; 'he's no good—none of them are good but Keziah. She does all the work of the house, and gets least wage.'

'Double her wage at once,' said Mr. Curgenven, and threw himself back in the chair.

Mrs. Trefry sent the boy from the room, and then shut the door behind her.

'Master,' said she, 'I think I'm bound to tell you that you may know what to do. I've heard a thing or two, and you'd best inquire into it. The head gardener here, I've been informed, don't do right by his master. Captain Curgenven had a dead horse put to the roots o' the vines, and he dug him up and sold the bones to the old chap as goes round buying rags and bones. So he robbed the vines, and as he disturbed their roots, there have been no grapes this autumn. Then he has sold the tomatoes, and the melons, and the cucumbers, and the pineapples, and the cherries and plums—-and the vegetables, every week he sends in a couple o' hampers of fruit and greens to the market at Liskeard and pockets the money. The captain knew nothing about it. And I'm informed, after a little hailstorm, he went and broke half the panes o' glass in the conservatory and sent for the plumber and glazier from Liskeard, who tipped him half-a-crown for his trouble; and he's always running short of garden tools so as to have to order more from the ironmonger, who gives him a Christmas-box for his obligingness; and half the seeds and roots ordered don't come up, for why—he gets an acknowledgment from the seedsman to let him pass on to him the old seeds as be no good—and get the master to pay for 'em as new and sound.'

'He shall have the sack at once,' said Mr. Curgenven, and he jumped out of the low window upon the gravel drive and strode away in quest of the gardener.

Mr. Quash, the gardener, received his dismissal with haughty indignation.

'I know what it means,' said he. 'Some one has been telling lies; and who that is I don't pretend not to know, and it's just as well you should be informed, sir. It's the keeper Jarvis, it is, and I'll just tell you the why, sir. Mr. Jarvis be uncommon put out, he be, because I've denied him apricots this autumn, for as how there was not enough for the house. Grapes I could not let him have; there was a misfortune to the vines. And he's expected to be supplied with potatoes to save him the trouble of growing them himself. We ran short of them too, and so I couldn't furnish him; and he has took it in dudgeon, and has made up a parcel of lies about me. But I can tell tales too. You may ask for yourself where all the pheasants and the partridges go. You may go up to the mail-cart at seven-forty in the evening and ask what be the meaning of a basket as is directed to the dealer in game at Liskeard, as is often put into the mail-cart just as it starts; and, sir, you may inquire why the gaurd of the coach, when he gets off at Trevisa Hill to hook up the shoe, picks up sum'at from behind a hedge just by the gate and chucks it into the boot. If that bean't pheasants for the Plymouth market I'm mistaken greatly.'

Mr. Curgenven walked back from the gardens. 'I shall have to dismiss the keeper also,' said he. Then he saw the footman coming to him without any hat or cap on his fair head.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said the young man, blushing to the roots of his tow-coloured hair, 'but I am awful sorry to say I must give notice.'

'Oh,' said Percival; 'what for, pray?'

'Well, sir, I'm awful grieved, but you see, sir, I've been comfortable here, and would awfully like to stay, but I can't. You see, sir, unbeknown to the late missus, cook and I was married.'

'Why, bless me! she's old enough to be your mother.'

'No, sir! not quite. She's only fourteen years older than me. And you see, sir, she'd be in an awful way if I wasn't to go as well as she. I'm very sorry, very, sir, to seem to disoblige you and put you to any inconvenience.'

'Very well, Charles, you must go, I suppose. Will you tell the groom to put the roan in the dog-cart; I am going out.'

'Please, sir! I'm awful sorry, but I believe the cook have ordered the roan and dog-cart, and got the groom to drive her into Liskeard.'

'Indeed!—that's cool.'

'To take out a summons against you, sir, for personal violence. She says you bruised her and dashed her against the door-post, and that you used to her horrible, abusive, and scandalous language. I'm awful sorry, sir. I tried to dissuade her, but she would. And when she's determined on a thing, sir, I know there's no turning her. But I hope, sir, you won't think the worse of me, sir, and— Oh! I forgot, sir. I saw the rector and Mrs. Curgenven coming this way, I think to call on you, sir. I'm awful sorry I forgot to say so before.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

WANTED: AN ADDRESS.

When Percival Curgenven reached the house he found that the rector and his daughter were already within. For the first time in her life Mrs. Curgenven had been obliged to ring at the front door of Curgenven House, and wait to be admitted. She could not now enter with the firm foot of consciousness that she was mistress *de facto* as well as *de jure*. That she was by right still squiress she did not for one instant doubt. But she had yielded her claims in deference to the opinion of her father. She entered with erect head, if not with assured foot; and, being within, looked round with quick turns of the head and inquiring eyes to note any alterations that had been made on which she might animadvert.

'Why, goodness, Percival,' said she, stepping towards the new squire as he entered, with something of the manner of a hostess receiving a guest, 'what is the meaning of this? I had to ring and ring, and got no answer till I pulled the bell the third time, and then Keziah answered the door. This will never do. You are certain to have visitors—a stream of them—in the afternoon, and the door must be properly attended to. What are all the rest doing? Where is Charles?'

'Charles came to me into the garden to give notice.'

'Well, but there are other servants.'

'They have all given me notice—except such as I have offered the sack to. And cook has borrowed the groom and dog-cart and the roan to drive into the town to take out a summons against me for attempted assassination.'

'Good gracious!' exclaimed the rector, looking back at the door over his shoulder.

'To have a medical certificate that she is bruised, and her shoulder dislocated. I shall have the police here shortly with a summons against me for that, and another for starving my pigs because the boy has neglected them.'

'This is dreadful!' gasped the rector; 'it will make such a scandal. It will be in every paper, in every mouth.'

'I don't care,' said Percival, shrugging his shoulders.

'But you must care, my dear sir,' said Mr. Pamphlet, with solemnity. 'Think what it is to be talked about, and written about—cruelty to animals—brutality to servants—females, too. I wouldn't have had this happen for worlds—and in *my* parish, and you bearing the same name as my daughter.'

'I don't care the snap of my fingers what folks say or write. What is their opinion to me!'

'My dear Mr. Percival,' remonstrated the rector, 'it is all very well to say this when you are a nobody. Excuse me, but when you were in the Pill-box, it did *not* matter. But now that you occupy a position as squire, are like to be put on the Commission, it is quite another thing. Did you never hear or read of Domitian and Caligula, how that they existed in daily, hourly terror of their servants, their friends, their wives, their subjects; they suspected poison in every draught and a knife up every sleeve. They endeavoured to maintain themselves by instituting a reign of terror; other princes cajoled, bribed, to save themselves. We—every one of us who is above the level of insignificance has to maintain himself as best he can against all his surroundings, he is at their mercy. They have not dagger or hemlock, but they have pointed tongues and slander. If they cannot take our life, they can destroy our reputation and make life intolerable. Don't you suppose that, now that you are squire of Curgenven, your life is to be as independent as it was in the Pill-box. You will have to live behind mosquito curtains, wear them about you all day, and lie behind them all night.'

'Confound it,' said Percival, 'you are all in league to make me regret my elevation.'

'It will have its advantages to you, of course, but the counterbalancing evils will outweigh all the satisfaction it may bring. If any man puts his head above-ground, it is popped at by a hundred rifles.'

'Here are the Tregonticks!' exclaimed Mrs. Curgenven, as a carriage with livery servants on the box, and a bloom of ladies within, passed the window. 'That really is too much—Lady Tregontick bringing all her daughters here on a Brautschau, as the Germans call it. Percival, say "Not at home!'"

'I have no one to take the message,' said Mr. Curgenven, 'unless the kitchen-maid will go. I fancy Charles has walked off to lament over his departure with the under-gardener.'

Next moment, however, the door was opened by the footman, and Lady Tregontick and the Misses Tregontick were announced. The lady was round, rosy, sparkling. She went up to Mr. Percival with gush, and to Mrs. Curgenven also with effusion.

'How do you do, Mr. Curgenven? I really must apologize. It is odd I know, but Sir Sampson is so shy. You will not mind my leaving his card. I have to do all calls for him. Oh, Mrs. Curgenven, this is delightful! The fact is my girls and I were coming on to call on you—that is why they are here. Philippa is dying to see your Alice—Alice is such a pet of hers.' Then to Percival: 'I took the liberty of invading you with my daughters because—you see we come from such a distance, and Irene's back is not strong, and I thought she would be over-tired in the carriage. Bless me! did I introduce you?—my eldest, Gweniver; my second, Irene; the baby—that's Philippa. We call her baby because she was the last, but, as you see, she is a big girl, and is out. You'll excuse Sir Sampson. I know you will. I calculate on Curgenven good-nature. It is proverbial. Sir Sampson is the shyest man in creation. His shyness has become a disease. He never goes out. When any one calls, if he is in the garden he hides behind a rhododendron bush. You may see his feet below and his hat above it—like an ostrich, if he can bury his head he thinks no one can see him. But there—you are so good-natured. I see it in your eye; and you'll forgive us never calling when you were in Liskeard; the fact is—how long were you there?'

'Twelve years.'

'And we did not know of it for three years. In the country it is so long before one hears of a stranger settling in one's midst, and then after that it has been a daily battle with me to overcome Sir Sampson. Poor fellow, he has promised, and I built on his promises, but they always failed. So time slipped away and we never called—or rather he never did. Then to-day I said to him, "Sampson, if you *will* not, I *must*. I will not endure the opprobrium of being regarded as unneighbourly and unkind." We were coming—my girls and I—to the rectory, and I thought just to leave Sir Sampson's card, put my hands together and say, "Please forgive! and allow me to call instead of Sir Sampson."'

'Shall I ring for tea?' asked Jane Curgenven.

'Oh, certainly,' answered Percival. 'But I don't suppose there is any kettle on—and the fire in the kitchen will be out, as the cook has departed to take out a summons against me, and has borrowed for the purpose——'

'Never mind, never mind that,' said Mrs. Curgenven hastily. 'We don't draw all our domestic worries before the public.'

Tea was ordered and was a very long time in coming.

When it did arrive the water was not only not boiling but was smoked. There was, moreover, no sugar.

Mrs. Curgenven rang.

The footman returned, and she asked for the sugar-basin. Charles hesitated, became red to the roots of his fair hair, and when the lady repeated her order, he replied in a low voice—

'Please, ma'am, it is run out.'

'Run out? What do you mean?'

'The boy have filled his mouth and pockets, and gone—and I can't find the housekeeper with the key of the store-room to get more out. Shall I bring in some brown, ma'am? There are a few spoonfuls in a bowl in the kitchen.'

Whilst this conversation was maintained in an undertone, at a sign from Mrs. Curgenven, which he perfectly understood, Mr. Pamphlet raised his voice and talked sufficiently loudly to divert the attention of the visitors. Happily none of the ladies took their tea sweetened. Whilst they were engaged in conversation Jane was in a condition of irritation. She had found smears as from greasy fingers on one of the cups and a high-milk mark of dirt within the cream-jug. She would take no tea herself, and the smoked insipid decoction was clearly not relished by the visitors. She, however, took a piece of thin bread-and-butter, but after a bite put it hastily down again. The bread had been cut with an oniony knife.

Presently the Tregonticks left, having first begged Mrs. Curgenven to accept their call as made upon her at the rectory. As Lady Tregontick said, she really had come to make that visit, and it was with that intention her girls had accompanied her. Now Mrs. Curgenven was not at home she could not go to the parsonage, and Mrs. Curgenven must accept the will for the deed, and Mr. Pamphlet accept a card she would leave with him from Sir Sampson, who was really too tiresome; he had given way to his shyness till it had grown on him, and become quite an affliction.

No sooner were the Tregonticks gone than Mrs. Curgenven turned on Percival with an exclamation of 'Really! you must get married. This never will do. Old Mrs. Trefry is not up to the mark. She has gone off with the key—no sugar. The cups and the cream-jug are simply disgusting. The character of the house is likely to suffer. You must either get married or get a proper housekeeper, only—don't take one of the Tregonticks: I don't mean as housekeeper, you understand. That woman came here to throw her daughters at your head—it is all fudge about her bringing them to see Alice, and her coming here to call on me, and it is all fudge about Sir Sampson's shyness, too. It is laziness, nothing else. Just look here, Percival—no, not at the outside of the cream-jug, but at the inside. Do you not observe the line round the interior? The jug has been put aside with the cream in it, to catch the dust and curdle; then—all in a scramble, to-day when wanted, some one turns out the nasty mess, and hastily puts in fresh cream. It is too revolting. This must not go on. What are you going to do about servants? Advertise? go to a registry office! Goodness me! and this is the time of all others when you most want servants—when the whole neighbourhood will make calls and have its eyes open to see what sort of an establishment you keep up—and talk about it afterwards for three months.'

Suddenly up jumped Mr. Percival Curgenven, shook himself as though to shake away the worries that were accumulating on him, and said—'By George! I shall be off!'

'Where to?'

'Why, to Scotland. I can't stand and face all these callers, and I must have a bit of a change after these confounded worries—and see about—that is to say——' he hesitated. 'I say, Jane, can I do anything for you at Drumduskie? can I take a message to Mrs. Boxholder or the girls?'

'You are going there!' exclaimed Mrs. Curgenven, with a flush in her cheeks and a glance at her father. 'Why, Percival! are they expecting you?'

'No, I have not said a word.'

'But—are you going to stay with them at Drumduskie?'

'No, not that; I am going there—let me see—fishing.'

'Fishing! Percival—now—at this time?'

'Never mind why—I am going there. I want to get away from this deuce of a worry. Is not that enough? I shall find a shake-down somewhere.'

'I am sure my sister will be charmed to take you in. You know her.'

'Oh yes; I met her when she was down staying here, and Rose, too. She's a nice girl. And I know the little one also. I forget her name.'

'Flora.'

'Yes, Flora. Of course, she's only a school-girl.'

'But you will write?'

'No, I sha'n't, I'll drop in. I shall go to the inn. If they ask me to stay with them I may accept, but I don't know. I like my independence, my pipe and my whisky, and to stretch my legs, as and where and how I like. No; I shall put up for a day or two at the inn. If you have a commission I'll take it.'

Then Charles, the footman, came in.

'There is Mr. Physic in the study, sir,' he said. 'Shall I tell him to wait?'

'Not for us,' said Mrs. Curgenven, hastily rising. 'No, we must go. Come, papa. We will not detain you, Percival, from business.'

'And,' said Mr. Pamphlet, 'do try to compromise this matter with the cook—or shall Jane see her, and attempt an arrangement? I dare say a five-pound note will suffice. Whatever you do, keep out of the papers, and if it can't be done otherwise, pay for being passed over. We won't detain you now.'

'Don't get Physic to find servants for you, Percival,' said Mrs. Curgenven, as she left the room. 'But can I help you, or will you leave it till you return from Scotland?'

When Mrs. Curgenven was outside with her father, she put her hand on his arm, pressed it, and said, 'You see he was struck with Rose. I had an idea at the time when she was staying with us last summer, and Percival was in the house too. He would make her laugh with his nonsense, and take her about the grounds to see this and that, and chaff her about a Scottish accent, and the tartan, and all that sort of thing.'

'But, my dear Jane, he is some twenty or thirty years older than Rose.'

'What of that? it will be pleasant for me to have a niece here rather than a stranger; and Lady Tregontick will most certainly tackle him for one of her daughters unless he be put beyond her reach.'

'But it will provoke comment, I fear.'

'It will make Lady Tregontick ready to tear out my eyes. If I can't be at Curgenven myself, let us have there one of ourselves and not a stranger—that is all I desire. Besides, Percival needs licking into shape, and Rose is the woman to bring him into order; she is more like her mother and me than any one I know.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GHOST OF A WILL.

When Mr. Percival Curgenven entered the library, he found Physic at the window, with his hands behind his back under the tails of his coat, watching the departure of Mr. Pamphlet and his daughter. The agent's sides were shaking with laughter.

Physic turned round, and withdrawing one hand, and pointing with his thumb through the glass, said: 'Madam would give a thousand pounds to be back here again and able to turn you out.'

'I dare say,' replied Percival carelessly. 'And I don't know that I should particularly object to be out of it.'

'Oh, come! Tell that to the marines.'

'It's a fact. If I were in the Pill-box, no cook would borrow my dog-cart, coachman, and roan to drive into town to take out a summons against me—for one thing because I shouldn't have a cook there—and life would be worth living then.'

'I don't understand.'

'It doesn't matter,' said Percival, throwing himself into a chair. 'As Jane said, one needn't rake out all one's domestic worries before strangers.'

'There's a difference between four thousand and a hundred and fifty, eh?' said the agent with a leer.

'Materially, a difference of three thousand eight hundred and fifty worries. I haven't very broad shoulders, I don't think I can stand them all.'

'Four thousand a year broadens the shoulders wonderfully, makes epaulettes, in fact. You have not as yet been here long enough to enjoy the comfort of being able to thrust your fingers over knuckles in gold.'

'I have been here long enough to get my hands full of prickles.'

'There are ups and downs in this world,' said Physic, 'and those who rise the fastest are often the quickest to descend.'

'I suppose so,' observed Percival with indifference, 'though how I'm to be tumbled back into nothingness is not clear to me.'

'You'd go down like lead if another will were to turn up.'

'Ah! Another will—perhaps so. But none has been found.'

'Awkward for you, sir, were one discovered.'

'Perhaps so.'

Percival lit a cigar.

'Do you smoke?'

'Thank you, if I may.'

The agent helped himself from Percival's case, and lit his cigar. He puffed at it for a minute without saying anything. Then he withdrew the cigar from his mouth between his two first fingers, and said, looking sideways at Percival, 'I suppose you have no suspicion that the captain made another will.'

'By George, no!' exclaimed Mr. Curgenven, startled out of his indifference. 'When?'

'Look here,' said Physic, 'I've got the draft of it. I, in fact, drew it up for him. May I spread it on the desk? You'd like to look it through. It is only a rough draft, and not a signed and attested will.'

He went to the writing-table, replaced the cigar between his lips, and drew an envelope from his pocket, opened it, and extracted a folded paper. He laid it on the desk that was upon the table, and passed his hand over it, spreading it out, and flattening the creases.

'There you are, sir, look as long as you like.'

Percival went to the table, put down his cigar beside the desk, and carefully read the document. When he had mastered the contents, and had turned it over and made sure it was unsigned, he said—

'I see. Lambert wanted to provide for his wife—I mean for Jane—in the event of his first wife appearing on the scene. I suppose this will if executed would be a legal document?'

'No doubt about it. Everything is left to Jane Pamphlet, commonly known as Jane Curgenven, and to you in trust for his daughter Alice. There is provision, as you see, for your annuity to continue as trustee, and something for madam.'

'So I see,' said Percival musingly; 'are you sure he never made such a will?'

'I am not sure at all. This is the rough draft; he had the fair copy from me.'

'Then where is it?'

'Exactly—where?'

'Jane cannot have found it. It was not in the box of deeds nor in his desk. Of course, if she had found it, she would have produced it.'

'Of course she would.'

'Then where can it be? Do you know whether it was ever executed?'

'I am almost sure that it was.'

'What makes you almost sure?'

'Because the captain told me he had signed it, and told me who had witnessed his signature. He purposely chose two ignorant and illiterate men, so he informed me, lest they should get a glimpse of the contents.'

'Who were they?'

'Old Roger Morideg and Pike the trainer.'

'By George! I'll ask them about it.'

'I believe Morideg is in prison. He was sent there for violent conduct towards me.'

'No, he is out. He came back to his cottage yesterday, and, by Jove! Physic, not in the most affectionate mood towards yourself. I advise you to look out. The old chap is furious, and he is half a savage.'

'I am not afraid of him. If he touches me, I shall send him to prison again, and next Lady-day his notice will have expired, and I shall turn him out of his cottage and tear it down. I am getting up a company for working the tin there, and begin operations next spring.'

'Well, never mind the tin-mine. What about this will? If it was executed I suppose it is somewhere.'

'And if somewhere, then you will have to return to the Pill-box, and give up your three thousand eight hundred and fifty worries for a hundred and fifty, as before.'

Percival seated himself, and took up the cigar. It had gone out.

'I say, lend me a light, Physic,' he said. As he put his cigar to that of the agent his hand shook, and he had difficulty in relighting his weed. Then he threw himself into an armchair, and looked round the library at the handsome mahogany furniture, the chairs leather covered, the bookcases with the well-bound volumes on the shelves, the white marble busts above the cases, the deep Turkey carpet on the floor, and the plush curtains to the windows. Certainly he would not readily abandon the possession of such a house, so many comforts, the wealth, the position. He had felt the annoyances to which he had been subjected, but, after all, they were trifling and transitory, and Curgenven House, the grounds, the estate, the shooting, the fishing, the manorial lordship, and four thousand a year were substantial comforts. He had tasted them, and he could not abandon them without a pang. Then, there was Justinian to be considered. He was well aware that he had not given the boy an education that would fit him to take his proper place in life; how could he on his little income? But now he intended to have a tutor for him, and insist on his sticking to his books, and then send him to Oxford to polish him up. Justinian had brains, and he had good sense. He would know that now he must qualify to be a country gentleman. But if the estate were to go from him, back Justinian would fall into his former condition, and he must become a settler in a colony without capital on which to settle, or go to a desk in a counting-house. And Justinian had been more delighted at the change of position than he had been himself. The boy was by nature cut out to be a young squire. The father loved and was proud of his boy. It would be a bitter grief to him to see the lad disappointed.

Physic watched Percival's face. He divined what was working in his brain.

'I suppose,' said the agent slowly, 'if you were to come across that will, it would go pretty quickly into the fire yonder.' He pointed with his cigar to the grate with oak logs burning in it.

'By Jove, no!' exclaimed Percival, drawing his feet back sharply. 'I'm not a scoundrel.'

'What! you would produce this will and upset the other?'

'I suppose so. I could do no otherwise.'

Physic looked at him with surprise. He could not understand whether Percival Curgenven were a hypocrite or a fool.

'What! you'd turn yourself out head and heels from this place?'

'If the will were to be discovered, of course I would. I'm not so sure that I ought not to act on the mere draft. It was clearly what poor Lambert intended.'

'Unless he destroyed the will after he had made it.'

'Why should he do that?'

'Well, he might not like to cast any suspicion on his marriage. It would have been awkward, were that will to be produced and suddenly Mrs. Jane to find that she had not been a wife at all, but a——'

'Yes—yes—yes!' said Percival hastily. 'Of course that is like enough, when years passed and Theresa never showed.'

His face cleared, he drew a long breath, he was relieved from his fear. 'Yes—that is certain. He thought it best to leave the whole matter to my discretion. Jane sha'n't suffer, nor, by George! shall Alice. I will act as I know would have commended itself to dear old Lambert; that I swear.'

'There is another idea strikes me,' said Physic. 'Some one may have had that will given to him to use or not to use, according as circumstances might require.'

'Yes—there is that,' said Percival, again looking blank. 'Have you the will?'

'I—how can you think that?'

'From your making the suggestion. But, of course, you have not, or you would have come forward with it. It can't be at the bank, I suppose.'

'No, it is not at the bank.'

'Then I don't know where it can be, if it exists.'

'And if eventually it should be sprung on you by some one to whom it was confided, and he offered to destroy it for—for a consideration?'

'Destroy the will?'

'Yes, or, rather, say nothing about it. Why, 'pon my word, a thousand pounds would be nothing like the value to you of having that paper in your hands, or having some one else to tear it to pieces and burn it, without your having touched it.'

'I'm not a scoundrel,' said Percival, uneasily. 'I do not understand you. Is that will in existence? If it is, who has it? Mind what I say. Not one step would I take to suppress it. If I knew that you, say, had it, or the butler, or that damned cook who has borrowed—but there, never mind that —I'd obtain an order or warrant, or whatever you call it, to have it delivered up, and I'd carry it to the registrar myself and prove it.'

'And your own self saw in half the branch on which you sit?'

'I would do what is right and honourable. I am a Curgenven. I'd go back to my hundred and fifty and into the Pill-box, and bundle Justinian off to the backwoods with a light heart—never would I connive at a piece of rascality such as you suggest.'

'Is this talk?' asked Physic, still uncertain. 'Let us suppose this draft were the actual signed and attested will, and I were to say, Give me a thousand pounds, and I put it in my pocket and walk away with it, and never shall it be seen by human eye again. Come, what would be your decision?'

'I could never look my boy in the face again if I did such a dishonest act. If you have the real will, produce it, and see if I am not as good as my word.'

'I haven't the will, so you may rest satisfied you will not be put to the test.'

Physic folded up the draft, replaced it in the envelope, and consigned it once more to his pocket.

'I think I'll say good-afternoon,' said he. 'I have one or two little jobs to see to before returning to Liskeard.'

'Good-afternoon,' said Percival listlessly; and he did not look up at the agent as he left the study. No sooner was he out of the room, however, than Percival started from his chair, ran to the door, and called him back.

'I say—Physic! I'm off to Scotland—to-day, to-morrow, when I can. Hang it! The cook has borrowed my trap and horse, but I suppose there is another. I can have the wagonette anyhow. Have you a train-book? I am sick of this. I must go. I only wait to have my things tumbled into a portmanteau, and then say good-bye to Justinian.'

'Off to Scotland! This is sudden.'

'Yes, and all the servants here are in insurrection, and all the neighbours with marriageable daughters are pouring in, besieging me. I must find—I mean I must—— But there, never mind what I mean. My head has been on a spin ever since I came in for this estate, and may I be hanged if I know what I ought to do about it now. Will you square off these servants? I can't—they are beyond me. Pay them what is necessary, and threaten that cook with prosecution for having taken my dog-cart, roan, and groom without leave. Jane had offered to meddle, but I won't have her in the place. You take this off my hands. Justinian will get along without me. Bathsheba will see that he does not come short. Oh—and give an eye that the gardener does not rob the greenhouses of all the valuable plants and cut the roots of the fruit trees. That is what these retiring gardeners do. And see that the maids don't smash any of the china, and that the butler doesn't walk off with any of the silver, and the housemaid run a broom-handle through any of the pictures. And get me in another lot of servants by the time I come back.'

'When will that be?'

'That is more than I can say.'

'But—if I may ask—what takes you to Scotland?'

'The mail, my boy. If you want to know my reason for going, wait and see. I'll make you rub your eyes.'

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FOURTEENTH.

'DRUMDUSKIE! Is it not sweet?'

'What is sweet, my love?'

'What is sweet? Why, what else can I mean, what else can I be thinking of, but that Rose is going to become Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven?'

'Is it settled?' asked Mr. Boxholder.

'Settled! No, not exactly that. But everything is on the high-road to a settlement. Mr. Percival has arrived, and is staying at the Railway Hotel. I invited him to be our guest, but he declined. I can understand his delicacy.'

'But, surely, Isabella—because Mr. Jack This or Mr. Tom That is put up at the Railway Hotel, that does not constitute him our son-in-law.'

Mrs. Boxholder turned a stony eye on her husband, and he shrank under her petrifying stare.

'Upon my word, Drumduskie, you forget your manners! Do you know whom you are addressing?'

After holding him with her eye in speechless collapse for a minute, she sighed: 'Well, one cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. I suppose a good deal of inherent barbarism remains in the Scottish blood. I will pass this over and answer your question. Mr. Percival Curgenven is here, and the purpose of his coming all the way from Cornwall has been communicated to me by Jane. He told her that he came here to seek a wife.'

'He's a little, a—I mean a wee bit old for Rose,' said Mr. Boxholder timidly, holding the mantelshelf.

'Not a bit. The match is suitable in every way. He is, I do allow, a little cubbish—has, in spite of his age, never grown quite out of cubdom; he has, I believe, tumbled about a long time in the backwoods, or the bush, or jungle, or somewhere of the sort; but if ever there were a girl calculated to bring such a man to order and trim him into shape it is my child. What a nose she has!'

'Yes, she has a nose.'

'I mean such character in it.'

'Yes, dear, I suppose so, a great deal of character in her nose.'

'And breeding,' added Mrs. Boxholder.

'No doubt, darling. Plenty of breeding in her nose.'

'She will look, every inch, the squiress of Curgenven. No one could have been found more suitable to succeed Jane. She also had a nose.'

'Of course she had, my sweet.'

'I mean a Pamphlet nose.'

Mrs. Boxholder lighted a spill at the fire and applied the flame to the candles. 'I hear wheels,' she said. 'It is those McGruffs, always either half-an-hour too soon, or half-an-hour too late.'

Mr. and Mrs. Boxholder were in evening dress; the lady in mauve silk and darker velvet, with lace and diamonds, not many diamonds, nor fine, but some. She had not found that there was jewellery among the heirlooms of the MacNaughts of Drumduskie, so she had obliged her husband to give her some. 'It was incumbent on the MacNaught to have his wife adorned in a manner suitable to her position,' she had said. 'It *is* the McGruffs,' said Mrs. Boxholder. 'Now, Drumduskie, mind, Rose is to have a proper dower. What are you going to give her? She shall not be sent off like a beggar.'

'My dear, upon my word, I have not considered.'

'Then the sooner you consider the better. Mr. Percival proposes to-night. You shall not go to sleep till you have decided what to give her; and mind, I'll pull your pillow from under your head and throw it across the room if the sum you propose does not seem reasonable to me.'

'I'll do my best, my darling, I will indeed. But here come the McGruffs. Where is the list of those who are to take in whom?'

'It will come right. I have not made out the list. I'll settle it; and, look here, no sneaking off to the smoking-room with one or two chums, and leaving me to entertain the rest.' Then: 'How do you do, dear Mrs. McGruff? So delighted to see you.'

Mr. Percival Curgenven was, in fact, at Drumduskie, and had called that afternoon, when Mrs. Boxholder had invited him to dinner. As it happened, she had a pleasant little party assembling that evening at her house, and she would be charmed if Mr. Percival would make one of the guests. He had accepted. Mrs. Boxholder had no doubt whatever as to his intentions, because Mrs. Jane Curgenven had had no doubt whatever.

Percival had met Mrs. Boxholder and her eldest daughter Rose more than once at Curgenven when they were staying there. Last summer he had been a guest in the house at the same time. Percival had amused himself with playful passages of arms with Miss Boxholder. She was a prim and rigid old young woman, and he had found entertainment in startling her and disturbing her gravity. Rose did not care for him, had not given him a thought, save as a scatterbrained, half-wild Curgenven cousin. Now she was quite unprepared by her mother for receiving him as a suitor. But Mrs. Boxholder knew her daughter, and was well aware that she would decide in accordance with prudence. She was not the young lady to let slip four thousand per annum for such a trifle as the encumbrance of a man for whom she did not care.

The guests arrived, mainly together, about twelve minutes after the McGruffs. Then Mrs. Boxholder was greatly taken up with receiving them, and whisking about, informing the gentlemen whom they were to escort in to dinner. She acted on her husband much as a little whirlwind on a feather, pursuing it, spinning it, driving it from place to place.

'Drumduskie, you take in Lady Duff-Duff. Now mind you carve the goose, and remember that there is stuffing.'

When she had revolved into another corner of the drawing-room she caught him again, and said in an undertone: 'Remember; over the wine no London shop talk.' Then, coming on Mr. Percival: 'Ah, Mr. Curgenven, how good of you to come to us North Britons from delightful Cornwall! You will take in my daughter Rose, and don't squabble, as you used to at dear Curgenven.' Presently she swept across the drawing-room towards Mr. Boxholder, who had got to the other side of the room, as he usually did. 'Now, really, haven't you heard the butler announce that dinner is ready? Do, for pity's sake, take in Lady Duff-Duff.'

'My dear, I am looking for her.'

'You won't find her in a corner. She is on the sofa, there behind the cushion,' pointing to a diminutive old lady who sat in a little heap, and was the most untidily and incongruously dressed person in the room.

After Mr. Boxholder had offered his arm to this lady all the rest followed, and the hostess brought up the rear with Sir Archibald Duff-Duff.

'Dear me!' exclaimed Mrs. Boxholder. 'I'm so sorry, Mr. West, that you have no partner. It is most unfortunate; I am heart-broken.' This to a solitary gentleman. In fact, the party had been made up before the invitation of Mr. Percival Curgenven, so that Mr. West's partner had been consigned to some one else.

But no sooner was grace said, and all were seated, than Mrs. Boxholder started to her feet with an exclamation of dismay that created a dead silence.

'Goodness me!' she said; 'we are thirteen.'

'Well,' responded Mr. Boxholder from the further end of the table, 'and what of that, my dear?'

'Why, Drumduskie, we cannot sit down thirteen to table.'

'Why not? It won't hurt us.'

'My dear, it is not possible. We are in Scotland, and must be superstitious. You forget. Thirteen! It will never do. Run, Thompson, to the school-room for Miss Flora.'

'Are we really thirteen?' asked Rose. Then she began to count, 'I am one;' then she counted all round the table, and the thirteenth fell on Percival Curgenven.

'No, no,' said he, 'let me count the opposite way. You are one,—two,—three;' the thirteenth then fell to him.

'Well,' said he with a laugh, 'then I won't be the thirteenth, I'll sit at another table. In Cornwall we are as superstitious as you are in Scotland, or are supposed to be.'

'Please, ma'am,' said the servant, returning from the school-room, 'Miss Flora has a sick head-ache, and is gone to bed.'

'There! a fate is in it,' said Sir Archibald; 'one of us must be sacrificed, you see.'

'Let two of us go to a side table,' said Percival, 'Miss Rose and I; then if we quarrel we shall disturb no one.'

Mrs. Boxholder hesitated a moment, and then said, 'No, we cannot do that.'

'I am the odd man,' said Mr. West; 'surely I am the one who should perish for the rest. Let me go to the side table.'

'No, Mr. West,' answered the hostess. 'If you do not mind—I am very sorry, but I will give you a partner. I am ashamed to ask it, but it will be the simplest arrangement. Would you object to the governess coming to be fourteenth, and sitting between you and Mr. Curgenven?'

'Delighted, I am sure,' said Mr. West.

'You are most kind to say so,' remarked Mrs. Boxholder; and then to the servant: 'Thompson, go to the school-room and tell Mrs. Lambert to come here as she is, not to dress, we can't wait for that. We cannot begin till she comes to be the fourteenth.' Then to Mr. West: 'I am sure you are most self-sacrificing; I am sorry to seem to put upon you, but you see I cannot help myself. You need not talk to her more than you like.'

A moment later Theresa entered, not agitated, quiet in demeanour, apparently indifferent to the fact that she was not in evening dress. Her pale sallow face was handsome, and those who saw that forgot how she was dressed.

Mr. West at once looked with a gratified expression at the hostess that plainly said, 'I am by no means dissatisfied with my lot,' but Mrs. Boxholder did not observe it; with her fan she pointed haughtily to the empty seat, and Theresa, with a slight bow to her, took the place indicated.

At once Percival turned and greeted her with effusion. 'So,' said he, 'I see you at length. Only think of this! As a stop-gap! I am so glad—so glad you are beside me.'

She raised her large speaking eyes and smiled.

There was something that touched Percival's heart in the solitariness of Theresa. He looked round the table at the ladies there, well dressed—with the exception of Lady Duff-Duff—got up to look their best, and then he turned to Theresa, in her sober dark dress without other adornment than a flower fastened in her bosom, her dark hair glossy and smooth, her ivory complexion and lustrous eyes! In beauty—though that was matured and perhaps tending to decline—she was incomparably superior to those who were in full war-paint at table. And yet she made no assumption to be anything.

'Theresa,' said Percival in a low tone, 'I must have a word with you presently.'

'I do not know when it can be.'

'I have come all the way for your answer to my question.'

'What question?'

'That I cast through the carriage-window.'

She looked into her plate. 'I cannot give it you now.'

'No, I do not exact it now. But have it I must.'

Nothing further passed between them; Percival's attention was drawn away by Miss Boxholder, who wanted to know what Mr. Curgenven could tell her about Aunt Jane and Alice and Mr. Pamphlet, and about various matters connected with Curgenven.

Percival did his best to answer, and Mrs. Boxholder glanced with satisfaction at her daughter and guest, in the conviction that they were getting on famously together.

Presently Percival had another chance of turning to his neighbour on the other side.

'Theresa! do you know that you have saved my life?'

'Surely not.'

'Yes, I was number thirteen, and you came in and made the fourteenth, so I have escaped. I owe you a debt for that.'

'An imaginary debt is easily repaid. I owe you a real obligation, for you set and healed my arm.'

'Ah! I forgot about that. So you are well now?'

'Yes, except for a slight stiffness. Now pray talk to Miss Rose, or her mother will visit your neglect on me.'

'Where shall you be after dinner?'

'That depends. If Mrs. Boxholder wishes my presence, in the drawing-room. If not, I suppose I shall go back to the school-room.'

'Very well. I shall find you somewhere; in the drawing-room or the school-room. I have come to Scotland to see you—and you only.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE SCHOOL-ROOM.

When Percival Curgenven entered the drawing-room with the gentlemen after the coffee had been passed round, his eye wandered in quest of Theresa, and he was soon aware that she was not there. Mrs. Boxholder had given her a look accompanied by a slight wave of her hand as she rose from table; this had not escaped Percival, and he understood now its significance.

Theresa had accomplished what had been required of her, to make the fourteenth, and was dismissed back into seclusion, to the nursery or to the school-room, and was not to appear in the drawing-room. She was not dressed for the evening, and was consequently unsuited to be with the rest, and only suffered to be among them for so long as was required to avert ill-luck from the party.

Percival's teeth closed, and a little spot of colour rose on his cheek-bones. If Mrs. Boxholder had looked his way she would not have liked the expression of his eye turned towards her.

He hoped against hope that Theresa would return. The party was not lively; it consisted for the most part of elderly persons, and there were elements that damped cheerfulness. Conversation rose, flagged, rose again, again to flag. A young lady sang, and sang out of tune. Mr. West attempted a humorous ditty, but the accompanist had never tried the piece before, did not catch the character, and was unable to accommodate the time to Mr. West's somewhat capricious rendering. Consequently voice and piano were not together, and the comic song proved a dismal failure; no one laughed, and Mr. West, very much ashamed of himself, retired into a corner and looked at an album of photographs.

Miss Rose without much persuasion was induced to play 'Le Carnaval de Venise,' of which every one knew every note by heart; she played it in a hard, unsympathetic manner. Conversation halted at the first few bars, and then resumed its uneven and straggling course. Mr. Curgenven stood by the piano and turned over the music pages for Rose.

'Now,' said he, 'why do you not give us the "Drumduskie Pibroch" or the "MacNaught Strathspey"?'

Miss Boxholder looked sharply at him to see whether he were making fun of her, but his muscles did not betray his thoughts. 'Come,' said he, 'we are old acquaintances; a word with you in the conservatory.'

The French windows opened into a glazed gallery that ran the length of the house, and was lighted by pendant lamps of ruby glass. It was furnished with flowers and ferns and plants of variegated foliage.

Mrs. Boxholder's eye followed Mr. Curgenven and her daughter as they entered the conservatory, and she flashed a gleam of triumph across the room at her husband, then hinted to Lady Duff-Duff the secret that filled her maternal heart with satisfaction.

'To propose, is he?' asked Lady Duff-Duff in a loud tone. She was somewhat deaf herself and spoke loudly, as though every one she addressed were three degrees deafer than herself. Mrs. Boxholder bit her lip. The words had been overheard, and at once a good many pairs of eyes were directed towards the conservatory.

When Percival was out of the room with Rose Boxholder he said: 'I will tell you at once what I want. How is your governess's arm? I attended her after the accident. Indeed, it was Justinian and I who brought it about, and I feel a sort of self-reproach accordingly.'

'I suppose her arm is better.'

'She can use it; I saw that at dinner. Is it quite well?'

'I do not know, I suppose so.'

'I dare say you would be good enough to allow me to see her for a moment, and find out that all is well. Her collar-bone was broken.'

'Oh, certainly. I fancy she is in the school-room. We can get to it this way; one window opens into the conservatory.'

'I shall be much obliged. You know I am a surgeon by profession, and this good lady was my patient.'

Rose Boxholder led the way to the end of the conservatory and tapped at a French window over which curtains hung; they were drawn aside, and Theresa appeared and unbolted the door.

Rose stepped in, and as she did so Percival trod on the train of her gown and tore it out of the gathers. She turned on him with an expression of annoyance, and looked at the mischief done.

'You must go to Louisa and ask her to run it up for you,' said Theresa; 'you cannot return into the drawing-room in this condition.'

Rose, without another word, but with shrugged shoulders and a sulky mouth, swung out of the school-room in quest of the lady's-maid; so Percival and Theresa were left together.

The school-room was plainly furnished, but comfortable. A pleasant fire was burning in the grate. By this Theresa had been seated in a low chair. There was no other light in the room save that thrown out by the coal fire.

'You were sitting there,' said Percival, pointing to the place from which she had risen to admit him and Rose. 'Go back there again, and let me take a chair by you. I have come nominally to inquire about your collar-bone, but you know very well that I did not come from Cornwall for that alone. You gave me no answer to a question I asked of you as you whirled away from Plymouth. And, by the bye, there is some money I borrowed of you——'

'You sent it me.'

'Did I? I had forgotten. That was marvellous; I am usually forgetful.'

Percival Curgenven took a chair on the further side of the fire-place to that occupied by Theresa on her low seat.

'How are you here?' he asked. 'Are they kind to you?'

She had her hands folded on her knee. Her fingers plucked at her dress; she slightly smiled: 'I suppose so—as much as

I can expect. I must live, and I must take what I can to live.'

'Now I have come to ask you to leave this situation, and come to Curgenven. My cook borrowed my dog-cart and groom and roan—without asking leave——'

'What, you want me to take your situation as cook?' she said, laughing.

'No; do not misunderstand me. All the servants are in revolt. I do not understand how to manage them. I got on well enough in the Pill-box, but in Curgenven I am lost. I must have a wife to manage for me.'

'As a sort of upper servant?'

'No,' said Percival impatiently. 'Of course not. I am bewildered at Curgenven. I want a wife to manage for me. I have not been accustomed to any other than a kick-about life. I have tried ranching and sheep-farming and timber-felling, surgery, journalism, and have failed in all I undertook, but never so dead as in my present position as squire. I bid fair to upset the whole cart. Come and be my wife, Theresa, and put me and Justinian and the place to rights. There is Justinian. He must be sent to college, or something done with him, and I don't know how to set about it. Then I don't know how to pour out afternoon tea; I gave tea-extract strong as poison to one and water to another; so that you see I positively must have a wife.'

Theresa remained looking musingly into the fire with a half-smile on her face, but with pain in the smile as well as amusement. She did not speak for some minutes, but at last looked up full at Percival and said: 'I should indeed be ungrateful were I to take you at your word without a caution. Do you not see that the wife you want is quite another woman from myself? You require one full of experience of English social life, not one who has been something of a Bohemian in her career as well as by birth. You need one who will supply all that is wanting in yourself. You and I have been hustled about in the world, have lived a hand-to-mouth life, associated not with the best classes, the well-to-do, and well-ballasted. You feel now that you are at a loss how to steer in a shoaly sea, and you ask for a pilot. For that I am unsuited. Take to you one who has grown up in the great social cage, who sees bars on every side and never thinks of beating her wings against these bars, who is content with the groundsel and sugar thrust in betwixt the bars, and has not the wish to cater for herself. That is the mate you require.'

'I know what you mean,' said Percival irritably; 'you advise me to match myself with a Jane Curgenven, who would drive Justinian into revolt in a week and send me flying from her into space in a fortnight. Do you think it possible I could endure such a woman? One such as Jane cannot think outside the cage-bars. The world without, the glorious sunshine, the free air, the rustling trees, the buttercup meadows are tabooed. The birds of the air that nest in hedge and under ivy are condemned and abhorred. Thank you for your kind advice; it is unpalatable, and I will not take it. Achilles and Siegfried were case-hardened, but each had a vulnerable point, one at the heel, the other between the shoulder-blades, but such a woman as Jane Curgenven is without a point through which a needle might be thrust to prick her conscience. Such women drive me to rebellion. No, Theresa, I must have a wife who has gone through some such experience in life as myself, who can understand my thoughts and troubles and difficulties.'

'Do you know my story?'

'I know how badly treated you were.'

'That is not all. By birth I am almost worse than a nobody. Mrs. Fenton's relatives said that I was picked out of a gutter, and harsh though the expression was, it is almost true. My mother was some tramp; she had lost her husband; she was taken ill with fever in a poor canvas tent in a raw wet autumn in a green lane near where Mrs. Fenton lived in Hampshire. I believe, but for her infinite kindness and gentle pity, I should have died as well as my mother. The parish authorities desired to move my mother; the ground was sodden, the November rains had soaked the canvas of the tent and the gales torn it; but the doctor who was summoned said that she could not be removed to the workhouse, and then dear Mrs. Fenton intervened and took my mother in. I was saved, but my mother died. Who my father was I do not know, who my mother was I hardly know—gipsies perhaps, tramps certainly, without relatives, without friends, and both died before I knew anything. No kinsfolk have ever sought me out and claimed relationship. I cannot tell, if I became your wife and rich, what they might do, supposing there are any—swarm round and pester me and you for money. Consider that you have been a wanderer, and have formed no ties in your neighbourhood. It would be well now for you to attach to you a woman who is well connected in your neighbourhood, and so through her you would be drawn into the county life of the families about Liskeard, whereas if you take me you will never be other than an alien to it, tolerated by it, not absorbed into it.'

'I have no particular eagerness to be absorbed into that dull and narrow circle.'

'You have to live as country squire, associate with men of the same class, and ought to be, in mind and feeling, in touch with it.'

'That I can never be. I have seen the world, been in all kinds of places and all sorts of society, and cannot cramp my thoughts and interests to the miserable pettinesses that occupy their attention. Come, Theresa, take me. Upon my soul I love and admire you as I do no other woman in the world. I believe with faith unquestioning that I shall be happy with you, and, so help me God, I will do my best to deserve your regard and make you a happy woman.'

He put out his hand towards her. His sincerity was not to be mistaken. His voice trembled as he spoke.

Then the curtains at the window were sharply drawn aside, and Mrs. Boxholder appeared.

'Oh!' said that lady. 'Oh, indeed!'

The injudicious exclamation of Lady Duff-Duff had been heard, and had drawn attention to the fact that Mr. Curgenven and Rose had retired into the conservatory.

'Who is that strange gentleman?' asked Sir Archibald of a lady near him.

'A great Cornish squire, I believe,' she replied.

'Bless me, you don't say so! I thought by his looks he was an American.'

Some parties, who had not heard what was said or gave it no heed, were for sauntering into the lighted conservatory, but were intercepted by Mrs. Boxholder.

'I think—you will excuse me—I think you had better not. Much vapour rises from the moistened soil at night, and as you seem heated, it might give you a chill, you see, dear Mary Grainger. I care for you as a mother. I cannot forget how unwell you have been.' Then, whilst engaged in conversation with Sir Archibald, she saw her husband make for the conservatory. At once she broke off what she was saying and pursued him.

'Drumduskie! what are you about?'

'My dear, there is one of the lamps in the conservatory smoking. I am going to turn it down.'

'Let it smoke. Don't you know what is going on there?'

'No, my dear, only smuts falling.'

'Smuts! Really you are too bad. Why Rose is receiving an offer.'

'Well, here she comes,' said Mr. Boxholder; 'not much concerned, I take it.'

As he spoke his eldest daughter entered from the hall-door, and her mother at once hastened to her.

'Well, dear, is all settled?'

'I had torn my dress out of the gathers,' answered Rose; 'that is, Mr. Curgenven did it. So I have been to Louisa to run it up. I have been as quick as I could.'

'But where is Mr. Percival?'

'In the school-room.'

'Did you leave him there?'

'Yes, mamma.'

'Well, my dear, have you accepted him?'

'I do not understand, mamma.'

'Hush! every one is listening.'

Mrs. Boxholder was puzzled. She saw that eyes were fixed on her and Rose, and that conversation had flagged. Every one, who knew or suspected that a proposal had been made, was intent to learn how it had been received.

Rose, quite unconscious of this, in the lull in the hum of voices said, so that every one heard: 'Mr. Curgenven is in the school-room, mamma; he asked me to take him there. He wanted to see and have a talk with the governess.'

Mrs. Boxholder's colour fell, but, recovering herself, she said hastily, 'Yes, he has a message for her from Mr. Pamphlet. But really he must not desert us; I'll fetch him back.'

So the lady, with fluttering heart and rising anger, swept along the conservatory, entered the school-room through the half-open window, drew back the curtains, and saw Mr. Percival Curgenven taking the hand of Theresa. He rose at once, so did Theresa.

'Allow me,' said Percival, 'to thank you, Mrs. Boxholder, for your kindness and courtesy shown during the weeks she has been with you to one who will shortly be Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

A BROKEN BREAKFAST.

The dowager Mrs. Curgenven was at breakfast with her father and daughter. She had supplied the first wants of both from the coffee-pot, and, before touching the bacon on her plate, she opened her letters.

Mr. Pamphlet, looking up at an exclamation that had escaped his daughter's lips, was surprised and startled to see her face drawn with an expression unusual, that implied physical or mental pain. Her hands had dropped on the table and the letter had fallen to the ground.

'Jane, what is it?'

Mrs. Curgenven tried to rise, then sank back in her chair again.

'Bless me! not a stroke?' asked Mr. Pamphlet.

Jane Curgenven stooped, picked up the letter, and passed it across the table to her father.

Mr. Pamphlet perused it without much emotion. It was from Mrs. Boxholder. It related how that Mr. Curgenven had called at Drumduskie, how that she, believing in the hint thrown out by her sister, had invited him to dinner, how that, instead of paying attention to Rose and asking for her hand, he had proposed to the governess. It went on to say that she—Mrs. Boxholder—had immediately ordered Mrs. Lambert, as an insolent, designing woman, who had used her house as a trap in which to ensnare and capture a man of means, to quit the house, and how that she believed that this woman was to be married forthwith to Mr. Curgenven. 'I wish you joy, my dear Jane,' said Mrs. Boxholder in conclusion; 'I heartily wish you joy of your new squiress—a crafty, speculating, cunning, deceitful hussy, with no breeding, no manners, no morals, no talents.'

The rector, having read the letter, folded it, then pushed his cup towards Mrs. Curgenven, and said, in even tones: 'Half, please, and not quite so sweet as the last.'

His daughter thrust back her chair from the table.

'Really, papa!' she exclaimed, then rose and left the room.

'I'm afraid your mother is somewhat out of sorts,' said Mr. Pamphlet to Alice, who was alarmed. 'You need not be uneasy, it will pass. She wishes to be alone.'

'But she has had no breakfast,' said the girl.

'My dear, she has had a good deal more than she can digest,' answered the rector. 'Will you half fill my cup, and not too sweet, please?'

When the Rev. Mr. Pamphlet had finished his breakfast he leisurely retired to his study, where he unfolded his newspaper and prepared to read it, when the door was opened and his daughter entered.

'Really, papa!' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'how could you? how could you?'

'Could what, my dear?'

'How could you pass your cup for more coffee, and concern yourself about the sugar, after reading such a letter, learning such news?'

'I am not sure that this is not the best thing that could have happened,' said the rector, folding his paper so as to be able to get at the telegrams.

'The best thing that could have happened, papa! Do you know that this abandoned creature will become Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven?'

'Why not, dear?'

'Why? For a thousand reasons. She is not a fit person to succeed *me*. She is not a fit person to be at the head of the parish, to associate with the gentlefolks round, to bear the name of Curgenven. *She*——' Jane quivered with indignation and wrath.

'My dear,' said the rector with composure, 'you must consider that she is, and was, Mrs. Curgenven. About that no moral, as well as no legal, doubt can remain.'

'I dispute it altogether.'

'But Physic has had properly attested extracts made from the register of the Embassy at Naples.'

'Registers have been tampered with before now.'

'We have not the slightest grounds for supposing this to have been done in the case of Lambert and——'

'That creature! I do not care what the register may say. It was no marriage. I do not believe it was anything but a joke.'

'It could not be a joke. There are more formalities to be gone through for a marriage at an Embassy than in England.'

'That vile creature may not have been of age.'

'Of that we have no proof.'

'I will not believe it. You, papa, speak of moral and legal proof. Legal proof does not concern me; legality and right are not synonymous terms. How often has the wrong person been accused and sentenced and hung for a murder!—all in the course of law. Legality does not count with me. And as for moral certainty—that I have most unshaken. Why, papa, have you considered that if the abominable conspiracy between this creature and Physic were based on facts, that *I*—I, your daughter—*I* who have been so many years Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven—would turn out to have been no better than I should be, not a respectable person, and Alice—Alice, my daughter, never ought to have been at all? Good gracious me!' Mrs. Curgenven took the paper impatiently from her father's hand and began to fan herself with it. 'A moral impossibility! I am as certain, as positive, that I have been perfectly respectable, and everything that I ought to have been, as that there is a heaven above my head and an earth beneath my feet, and that I am Mrs. Curgenven, the dowager, the widow, the legitimate widow of Captain Lambert.'

'You beg the question throughout.'

'I do not admit it to be a question.'

'Now, my dear, do not become hot and extravagant.'

'I am not hot and extravagant, but I cannot understand your pushing up your cup for coffee, and wanting less sugar, when the character of your daughter and the legitimacy of your grandchild were at stake.'

'They were not at stake, Jane; do be reasonable. Whatever that story about Lambert's marriage may have been in reality, the only menace to you was from that person who claimed to have been Lambert's wife.'

'She never was his wife.'

'Never mind that. Now she is about to become Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven, to occupy a position which she says ought to have been hers for the last nineteen years. She gains everything she has desired.'

'It is monstrous that she—such a Thing as she—should get her way.'

'She has got it, and will be content. Every occasion for her to rake up that miserable old story is taken from her.'

'She will do it to spite me.'

'Not unless you drive her to do so by unreasoning impatience and resentment.'

'Resentment indeed!' Mrs. Curgenven tossed her head; 'as if I could feel any such emotion as resentment towards such a despicable, abandoned scum of womanhood as that!'

'My dear, your words are strong.'

'Not a particle too strong.'

'I hope you will not show any ill-feeling towards her. You are not justified in pronouncing on her moral character without knowledge.'

'Oh, I know!'

'What do you know against her?'

'Never mind; I do know.'

'And I insist on being told what it is you have learned that has not reached me.'

'She has been on the stage.'

'Well; she had to earn her livelihood.'

'Every one knows what the stage means, and in America too!'

'You are judging wickedly and cruelly.'

'I know quite enough. The very fact that she pretends to have been Lambert's wife is in itself condemnation. If that were not enough, is it not fatal to her moral character that she should pounce down on Percival and devour him?'

'Really, Jane, this is indeed unreasonable. You yourself wanted to secure Percival for Rose.'

'Oh, there is no harm in that.'

'Then where is there the harm in this lady taking him?'

'Lady! Papa, how can you speak of her by such a term? She is no lady, never was, and never can be.'

'Instead of her pouncing down on Percival, it seems to me that Percival has taken a long flight, hovered over Drumduskie, and swooped down on her.'

'She summoned him there.'

'How do you know?'

'I am morally sure of it. Percival is a fool, and she is clever as the evil one himself.'

'Anyhow,' said the rector, 'give me my paper. The thing is done, or will very soon be done. Percival has made his choice, and this person will very shortly be here, installed in the Manor-House as Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

'You are not going to be so wicked as to marry them?'

'I am not asked. I presume they will be married in Edinburgh or in London, and come on here after the wedding or after the honeymoon. You will have to compose yourself to receive them.'

'I never will receive her. I never will go near the house. I don't think I will go to church if she dares to show her brazen face within the sacred walls.'

'My dear Jane, you must not offend Percival or her.

Remember there are all the clubs in the parish, there is the National School, there is the Institute, the Parochial Library, there are the mission woman and the Scripture reader, the choir, the Band of Hope, Anglo-Israel—all dependent in the main on the subscriptions from Curgenven House. I cannot afford to be on bad terms with Percival, and that without reason. Besides, it always has a bad look if the rector and the squire do not pull together; and, as a matter of course, all the blame is thrown on the former. It stands in the way of ministerial work, my dear Jane——'

Then in at the door burst Justinian, with flaming cheeks and glittering eyes.

'Mr. Pamphlet—Aunt Jane'—Mrs. Curgenven was not his aunt, but the boy had been allowed so to designate her—'I have had a letter from the gov. Oh, such dreadful things! He's going to be married. It is a shame; and I always thought he loved my mother so. And it is to her who was thrown out of the gig and broke her collar-bone. I don't say but she's not such a bad lot, only now she'll be sticking herself between us, and the boss and I will never be so chummy as we have been.' His voice shook, tears were forming in his eyes.

'It is infamous! That woman will disgrace your father and the place,' said Mrs. Curgenven.

'Be silent, Jane. I will not permit this.' The rector stood up, he was roused and angry. Jane drew back with a sullen look in her countenance.

'My boy,' said Mr. Pamphlet, 'your father has a perfect right to choose, and has no doubt made the best choice he could—one that will suit him. You must not blame him.'

'It will spoil my happiness. The governor and I were always together.'

'It will have this good in it for you, that now you will go to school.'

'I am too old for that.'

'Then to a private tutor.'

'I should not mind. I shall be glad to be away. I cannot bear to think of my father married, and she will very likely turn his heart away from me.'

Mrs. Curgenven was about to speak, but her father raised his hand in caution.

'My dear Justin, in such a house as Curgenven there must be a mistress. Your father could not get on without a wife to manage for him. Now, as you know, everything is in confusion, the servants leaving, and pillaging right and left.'

'Let him pay a woman to be his housekeeper. But to give me another mother is too bad.'

'No woman would look after his and your interests like one who is his wife. Your father cannot in his present position consult your fancies only, but what is best for the place, for himself, and for you. Now, Justin, I am quite sure that were he alone here, unassisted, he would become desperate.'

'I don't know about that. She shall never be a mother to me.'

'You will show respect to her as your father's wife.'

Justinian shrugged his shoulders.

Then arrived Mr. Physic.

'So, sir,' said the agent, 'you have heard the news? Wonderful, is it not? Never expected that. I have had a letter from Mr. Curgenven, and he desires that the bells should be rung, of course with your permission, to welcome him and his bride when they arrive.'

'When will that be?'

'In a week.'

'Papa,' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'you never will allow that!' Her colour rose. 'It will be a desecration of the bells.'

'I am the best judge of that, Jane,' said her father gravely. 'Indeed I shall. It would be remarked were the bells not to be rung. When Percival came into residence, with good feeling and kindly thought for us, either the ringers did not attempt to give him a peal or he forbade it. Now that he returns with a wife, with Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven, of course I shall allow the bells to be rung. You may write and say so, Physic. It would be a gross and unpardonable offence against good manners and against policy to refuse them on such an occasion.'

'Quite so. Hear, hear!' said Physic. 'Clever, too, weren't she, to catch the great prize, before any other anglers had their rods out?'

'You will be pleased to remember his son is present,' said the rector haughtily.

'Bless me, so he is. How are you, young squire?' Justinian did not like the agent, and he responded with curtness that was short courtesy.

'Mr. Physic,' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'will you permit me a word in the garden with you?'

'Certainly, madam,' and with a bow he held the door as she swept out of the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SECOND DISAPPOINTMENT.

'If I may trouble you,' said Mrs. Curgenven with a stiff bend and an imperious wave of her hand in the direction of the garden—that is to say, the walled rose-garden. A country parsonage is not infrequently made sweet and lovely by its old-fashioned garden. The parson has not at his command sufficient glass and a sufficiently skilled gardener to inflict on him the fashionable bedded-out uniformity. He has to content himself with the old favourite flowers that were the delight of his predecessors, growing without more attention than occasional weeding and thinning out; flowers that have made the garden their own, consider the beds as their own, and will not be displaced for newer and more brilliant introductions; flowers robust in growth and hardy in constitution, exhaling odour as of the Spice Isles, not leaving the soil bare and barren for nine months and covering it for three, but coming and going in wondrous order, a great variety, changing kaleidoscopically every week, in winter represented by Christmas roses and aralias, and a timid cheiranthus and anemone. And the garden wall is covered with the old monthly rose, over which the laundry-maid empties the soapsuds every week, and which, in return, flowers abundantly till the midst of January.

Into such a garden as this Mrs. Curgenven introduced Mr. Physic. It possessed one long walk under a wall that faced south, against which grew fig trees, yellow jessamine, and traveller's joy. Under the wall was a narrow bed in which at this time were beautiful pink Guernsey lilies and a border of autumn colchicum.

'Now, then,' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'what do you think of this affair? Is there no way of stopping it? Can you not find that this wretched woman has a husband alive?'

'I cannot do that, madam. I am sorry, but what can I do?'

'It is not my place to say what you are to do. You are a lawyer, and I suppose there are some means of preventing Mr. Curgenven from making a fool of himself and covering the family with discredit.'

'Indeed, I know of no way.'

'But it is such a terrible thing; that person is no more fit to be in Curgenven than is Esther Morideg. No neighbours will call. She will not be received into any decent house. It will be intolerable—living so near, having her occupying my rooms, sitting in my chair, having the key to my store-room. It is contamination to think of it.' Then sharply turning on Physic she asked: 'About her past history, what have you learned?'

'Very little. I never dreamed of her becoming the wife of Mr. Percival. All *I* know about her concerns the marriage. That I did investigate. I made the requisite inquiries at Naples, and ascertained that she really had married Mr. Lambert Curgenven when he was a young lieutenant. There can be no doubt about the case. There is a family resident at Salerno, I understand, that was at Naples at the time and they remember the circumstances. I believe the chaplain who married them is now incumbent of a parish in the east of England. I am sorry to have to assure you that all doubts as to the fact of the marriage are at an end. That is all I know.'

'Yes, you fancy you have established it. But have you communicated with this incumbent in the east of England, and this family at Salerno?'

'I have not written to the latter, but to the former I have.'

'I do not believe in this creature being the same person. She has not been confronted with any of those who were at the pretended marriage. How can you say she is not an impostor, who, having heard of the affair, takes on herself the *rôle* of being the neglected, ill-used wife?'

'That view is possible, but it is easily dispelled. If need arise for establishing the identity it can, no doubt, be done, and what is questioned made quite certain.'

'"No doubt!" "quite certain!" You are all in league against me. I *do* doubt. I am *not* certain, and till all is so clear that every line of it can be read I will not believe, in the first place, in the marriage; and then, even suppose there were this marriage, that the woman who has been here and has now entangled Mr. Percival in her net is the same person who secured Lambert—I mean my husband. If that woman comes here I do not care where I go, what I do; I will not remain in the same place with her.'

'So confess defeat,' said Physic with a smile.

'What do you say? Confess defeat? You think it will be so? Rather than that I will stay and confront her. Oh, would to Heaven!—but no, I must not say that. By the way, there was a scandal—I heard you say something about it—as the reason why Lambert, supposing there were truth in the story of the marriage, deserted her.'

'Nothing could be proved.'

'But a great deal may be proved. There is no smoke without fire.'

They had reached the end of the long walk. Then both turned.

Physic, speaking slowly, asked: 'But if it be so unpleasant to you, madam, to have the lady in this place, would you not do your utmost to force her to quit it?'

'Of course I would. But what can I do?'

'You must understand that I throw out a suggestion only. There was—there may be still—a will in existence executed by the late Captain Curgenven, that left everything to you in trust for Miss Alice.'

'There is! Where is it?'

'That is more than I can say. Some parties interested in the matter have it. I do not say I have seen it. If that will were produced, then Mr. Percival and his new missus would be bundled neck and crop out of Curgenven, and you would be reinstated as mistress of the house.'

Mrs. Curgenven drew a long breath and walked more uprightly than before. 'There is such a will! It must be produced. I knew that Lambert had provided for us.'

'If this will could be found it would crush Mrs. Percival, who has married the new squire for his wealth and position, and has rejected others, I dare say, for him.'

'Where is this will?'

'You do not suppose that I have it?'

'Of course not, or you would have proved it for us.'

'I have been sounded relative to it by interested persons who have the will. I believe that there is no likelihood of their surrendering it unless well paid for so doing.'

'Oh, they shall be paid.'

'They will not be content with a small sum. What do you now get out of the estate? Nothing.'

'Nothing by law, I suppose; but Percival has assured me that I shall be treated liberally.'

'Yes, he will give you alms. But what if you could establish your right and that of your child to Curgenven? What if, when the bride arrives and expects to be received with bells ringing, and triumphal arches, and cheers of "Welcome!"

from the tenantry, and the path flower-strewn by the school-children—the children of your class, madam—she finds, instead, that she has not any right to descend at the steps, and that you can slam the door in her face?'

'I would give a great deal to be able to do this,' said Mrs. Curgenven with heightened colour.

'The difference to you, ma'am, would be that of four thousand a year and nothing. Of course the parties who pretend to have the will in their hands are well aware of that, and therefore will not be content with less than a thousand pounds for the testament.'

'A thousand pounds! Surely I can obtain a warrant or something of the sort to force them to give up the will?'

'If you knew who they were.'

'But you know.'

'No. I am approached through a third party. They are cunning dogs, very cunning, and are aware of the danger. It will require negotiation in a very circuitous manner to obtain the document, so that no one may be compromised. But I think it can be done for the sum I named.'

'It is an impossible sum.'

'It might, perhaps, be arranged to be paid in two instalments. I am not sure, I merely suggest this as possible.'

'I don't believe it could be enforced. Such an agreement must be illegal. It is blackmail.'

'No doubt it is, but it is the only way by which this will can be got back into our hands. There are great rascals in the world, and one must at times submit to their rascality to get at one's rights.'

Mrs. Curgenven considered.

It would be a satisfaction to be back in the Manor-House. She had felt cramped and oppressed within the narrow walls and under the low ceilings of the Parsonage. She had missed her conservatories, her flowers and fruit, but, above all, the deference that had been paid her as squiress and queen of Curgenven. A parlour-maid, a housemaid, and a cook formed the establishment at the rectory, and she liked to be waited on by liveried servant-men and a butler. She could not now call out her carriage and pair, but must drive in a little buggy with her father, and the clerical cob was a slow trotter that walked up all the hills and down as well. But comforts, luxuries, deferences weighed light with her against the overwhelming desire to exclude that woman, Theresa, from the great house, from occupying that position which had once been hers. She could not reconcile her mind to remaining in the place and seeing this woman in the great house, reigning in her stead, occuping the manorial pew in the church, taking precedence of her in social life, receiving letters addressed 'Mrs. Curgenven,' whereas she must sink to be the dowager Mrs. Curgenven.

It really would be worth a thousand pounds to escape such a miserable condition of affairs, such daily annoyance, such bitter humiliation to her pride. Her father, she knew, would stoop to be friendly to this person because of the subscriptions to the parochial organization which he could not do without.

'I suppose this will of which you speak,' said Jane, throwing up her head, 'acknowledges my right to be Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven?'

'Well, no,' answered the agent with some hesitation; 'you see that would spoil everything. The will, I am told, mentions you as Jane Pamphlet, commonly known as Jane Curgenven.'

'What! proclaim me a—something I will not even name?'

'It need never be known.'

'But if the will be proved it will be known.'

'It will not be talked of, you may be sure, by the officials at Somerset House; they have other things to think of.'

'But any one may pay a shilling and read it—read in it that I—I, Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven, have not been the wife of Captain Curgenven, and that my child has no right to her father's name. Heaven forbid! There is no such will. Such a will never could have been drawn up by my husband. He dared not have done it. It is an impudent forgery; it is a forgery by designing, unprincipled persons who seek to make capital out of my difficulties. No, in Heaven's name, not one penny will I give for such a will. It is no genuine will! What a world of fraud and wickedness we inhabit! Why, such a document was designed to make out my husband to be one of the greatest scoundrels that ever lived. He was thoughtless and had his weaknesses, but he was a man of honour and a gentleman. No, emphatically No. I will none of it.'

Mr. Physic drove back to the market town that day with his mind not on his cob.

He had met with two rebuffs, first from Mr. Percival Curgenven and then, that day, from Mrs. Jane. Neither would pay for what he had in his possession. Percival was ready to accept the consequences should the will be produced. Jane was unwilling to have it produced, even that it should secure her a future of comfort and a position of dignity. Physic had reckoned on Percival falling at once under the inducement he held out to him of having the document destroyed that would expel him from Curgenven. Physic had thought it well to let the globe-trotter taste the pleasures of rank and wealth before he warned him of the precariousness of his position. But, Percival, rolling stone though he had been, improvident, without tenacity of purpose, without persistency in any course, had his own ideas of what was right and honourable, and there was that in the manner in which he had cast from him the solicitations of the agent which convinced the latter that the squire was sincere in his resolve to do nothing which was not above-board.

'He's a fool,' muttered Physic; 'he don't know which side his bread is buttered; or, I shouldn't wonder if he don't care particular for butter at all, he's gone on so long on dry bread.'

As for Mrs. Jane Curgenven's objection, he could understand that better than he could the refusal of Percival.

'She's 'tarnation proud, that she is. She'd rather be Mrs. Curgenven on twopence-ha'penny than take thousands and have it known she was no missus at all.'

He drove on with his chin on his breast and his brows knit.

'There's naught for it,' said he. 'I must try it on with the new missus.'

Then he laughed.

'Well, now,' said he, 'it was just hereabouts that she caught me across the back of my hand with the reins. I'll make her smart for the smart she then gave me. What's she to become Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven? She's no better than an adventuress. She'll have no scruples. She'll know the vally of butter. She'll do everything she can not to have it scraped off with a rusty knife.'

He shook his head. 'She's a deep 'un,' said he, 'to go and refuse me, as she did, with such airs too—she who hadn't a farthing to bless herself with! But she had her eye on Percival, and he has caught hers. A clever rogue! But she shall find me cleverer than she is. She thinks, does she, that she's netted Curgenven, with its park and its mansion, and the family plate and jewels, and the presentation of the rectory, and four thousand a year, and moorland where there be mines that, if properly managed, would double the income? She thinks she has got all that by making eyes and saying "Yes," does she? Then, by Ginger, she's mistaken! I have to be reckoned with. If she will eat butter, she must pay for it—and pay me.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

A RUINED HOME.

Justinian walked with flushed cheek to the rectory. His lips were dry, and he felt feverish and restless. He had not slept much the previous night—according to his own account not at all, but that was an exaggeration into which others liable to wakefulness fall. His father was to return that day, bringing with him the new wife and mistress of Curgenven. That she should be mistress of Curgenven concerned Justinian little, but that his father should have taken to him a companion who would thenceforth be nearer and dearer to him than he, his son, was—that concerned the boy greatly, and made him very unhappy. He had been with his father in all occupations and amusements, had had hardly a companion of his own age—certainly none whom he loved to be with so much as his father, who had the carelessness and caprice of a child in him in his mature years, who entered with zest into all sports, and had as great an aversion as had the boy to all serious work.

Justinian felt himself cast aside, and he was bitter at heart against the woman who had supplanted him. If the truth must be told, the lad had cried during the night, but he hardly admitted to himself that he had been guilty of such weakness.

He could not amuse himself in the house or in the grounds. On all sides were tokens of preparation for the reception of the new Mrs. Curgenven—servants dusting and polishing, gardeners examining borders and weeding drives. So he went to the rectory to divert his thoughts.

But Alice was engaged at her music with a master, and must not be disturbed. Mrs. Jane Curgenven could not trust herself to speak more than a few words with the lonely boy; she felt with him and for him, but had sufficient discretion and good feeling not to give vent before him to what she thought. The reverend the rector was due at the school to teach the children nothing definite that could do them good in this world or the next in the most sounding words. Mr. Pamphlet flattered himself and informed all the world that no Dissenter ever withdrew a child from the class for religious teaching in the Curgenven school. This was not, however, altogether wonderful, as the teaching of the rector was so absolutely colourless that not a prism could polarize it and resolve it to definite tints.

Justinian, finding that he was not wanted or welcome at the rectory, left it and wandered in the direction of the moors. He would go there—away from every living man, lie in the sun and fret over his trouble alone.

But hardly had he entered the lane that led out on the moors than he encountered a party of men armed with picks and crowbars, headed by Mr. Physic, all, save their leader, smoking and laughing and talking.

Physic addressed some passing observation to Justinian, which he acknowledged with a nod, and then pushed on. He disliked the agent, and the observation made was not one to please him; it referred to his 'new mamma.'

No sooner was the young fellow on the moor than his arm was caught by Esther; she was in great agitation, and her eyes were full of tears.

'They've a-done it,' she said. 'Oh, Master Justinian! do'y come now and see.'

'What is it, Esther?'

'They've a been a-muzzling' (knocking down) 'the house. There was a core o' men here—a foothy' (daring) 'lot they was. And vayther, he be like as one maazed.'

'Your father back!'

'Yes, I reckon, a' far as his body can be, but not his mind. He ain't the same man. Come along, soas!'

Justinian found it hard to keep up with the girl, who ran before him, and turned occasionally to see that he was following, and to hurry him forward.

On reaching Tolmenna Justinian found that it was completely wrecked. The wretched furniture had been taken out of the cottage and cast in a heap on the turf or piled up, and then roof and walls had been destroyed by the workmen engaged by Mr. Physic. The chimney stood, and some fragments of wall; but what had at one time been the room in which the family had lived was reduced to an accumulation of turf, rafter, and stone, thrown together. To restore the cottage so as to be habitable was not possible.

Amidst his furniture sat, in a stupefied and listless mood, the owner of the ruined cottage, the man who had once knocked down Physic—himself a greater wreck than his house.

The old moor-man, accustomed to spend his days abroad in the open air, traversing the hillsides, unrestrained by hedge where there was not a road, not even a path, asking no man's leave to go where he had a mind, consulting no will save his own as to what he should do, at an advanced period of life had been suddenly translated to a prison, and every condition of existence had been reversed. Unable to endure the change, his mind had given way. He had been released and had returned home with his brain benumbed, and if aught further had been needed to complete his stultification, it was to have his house gutted and then destroyed before his eyes. He made no resistance. He looked on with dazed eyes, and where he had sunk down when driven forth there he remained.

Meanwhile the old woman had gone off in search of some place of refuge. Warning enough had been given by Physic that he intended to dislodge his tenants, but the threat had been disregarded, and no provision made by them against the day when they would be homeless.

With his wonted impetuosity, and his generous feelings roused, Justinian went up to the old man, saying: 'It is a shame! I'll see my father about it.'

'This bain't his land,' answered the moor-man.

'No; but he has plenty of houses. I will see that you have one.'

Old Morideg shook his grey head.

'I were born and bred on the moor,' said he. 'Your father ha'n't got any houses there, and I can't live where I'm not free. No, young squire.' Again he shook his head. 'It be my fault, it be. To every man comes once his chance, and if he put it from him or take hold wi' half a heart, then he never gets his chance again.'

'But what chance came to you?'

'See,' said Morideg, extending his open hand to the ruins of his house. 'Thickey house 'ud been standing as good as iver if I'd 'a took my chance when the Lord gave him to me.' After a pause and a blow against his grey head: 'Us be a pass'l o' ungrateful creeturs, as is blind to what us ought to do till it be too late. Thickey house—the Lord put the chance bevoor me, and I didn't lay hold wi' both hands.'

'But what chance did Heaven give you?'

'To knack 'n on the head, stone dead, man,' answered Morideg.

'To knock whom?'

'Why, Lawyer Physic, for sure. Who else could I mean? I just gave 'n a fiffery sort o' a clout, but I shu'd 'a given he a good blow as 'ud 'a skat his neddick' (broken his neck), 'and then thickey house 'ud 'a been standing still.'

'But,' said Justinian, startled at the self-reproach of the old man, 'if you had killed Mr. Physic you'd have swung for it.'

'I? Who'd ha' swung me?'

'You'd have been caught and sent to prison, tried, and hung.'

'No, they'd ne'er 'a caught me on these moors.'

'Well, anyhow, you could not have come back to the house.'

'Maybe. I don't deny that. But, then, some day or other I mun leave 'n for good and all. It ain't I as matters, it's the house. There's no house now for my old woman nor for Esther. If I'd 'a done for Physic he'd not ha' been able to 'a muzzled it all down from the strick to the plancheon' (from the thatching to the floor), 'as he hev a-done. And then there'd be a home for Esther. But I never proper laid ho'd o' the chance the Lord gev me. There's the unfort'nate thing, and now I mun suffer for it.' He rubbed his head. 'Does Physic think to find ball' (open a mine) 'here where the old men never made costeening' (exploring) 'pits? Every one who ain't a fool knows that there be no tin where no costeening and no streaming hev been tried. The old men waren't fools. He who goes after tin elsewhere, he's sure to go wrong.'

The wife came up. She had been to a farm under Trewortha Tor, and had obtained permission for her to move with Roger and her grand-daughter for a while into an old building on the further side of the stream—a building long used as a cowhouse or stable, which had a roof to keep the interior dry, but was without window or chimney. Mrs. Morideg knew very well that if she asked for anything it would not be denied her, so great was the fear in which she was held; at the same time she was aware that she and her family would be unwelcome tenants, and she had therefore asked for the use of the shed only till such time as a fresh cottage could be erected to accommodate her party and contain her few sticks of furniture.

Justinian again offered one of his father's cottages, but the Moridegs refused it again. They could not breathe, they could not be happy, in the midst of hedges, among trees, on cultivated land. Then he cheerfully and good-humouredly assisted them in the transport of their goods. The farmer of Trewortha had sent some of his men and a rude cart, but no crockery could be placed on wheels where there was not a road, only a track over the moor, and where the cart bounced and lurched at every moment in such a manner that it was wondrous that it did not itself go to pieces.

The place fixed on by Mrs. Morideg for a temporary dwelling was further removed from civilization, deeper in the depths of the wilderness than where the old hut had stood. There is a little stream called the Withy Brook that rises in a broad basin under the Cheesewring and Boarrah Tors, wild, but devoid of remarkable beauty. But a ridge of granite runs out from the east and contracts the valley, and on passing this a scene of singular desolation and beauty is disclosed. Kilmar, a granite mountain of noble proportions, towers up in queenly majesty above a wide marsh into which the Withy Brook and several other streams from converging glens plunge and disappear. The grey level surface of the marsh forms a triangle and covers what was once a lake, and is now impassable by the foot of man. Finally, the united streams break their way over a step of granite, and fall in cascade into the river Lynher. Tradition says that a city (Tresillan) stood at the margin of the choked lake, that was a market town before Launceston and Liskeard were other than breezy down; and, strange to say, the banks and slopes from the hills are strewn with ruins of ancient dwellings and enclosures of unknown age, the remains of an unknown people whose flint weapons are turned up by the spade and share wherever a farmer extends the area of cultivated land.

'Do you see?' said Esther, pointing to the wild expanse; 'now you can understand what vayther and I said, as how none could ever catch him or me if us chose to go on the moors, and the police were after us. Why, I reckon there's none but I as know how to cross Trewortha and Tresillan marshes. There's but one way, and there's not another could do it. If he tried he'd go in and never rise again. But none would be that venturesome to try it.'

The wind was blowing from the south-east. The two young people stood on high ground, looking down on the desolate surface of the marsh.

'Hark!' said Esther. 'I reckon I hear bells. For sure it be the Curgenven bells.'

Justinian's heart contracted.

'My father has come home,' he said, 'bringing with him a new mother for me, and I feel like one banished from home—much as do you, Esther.'

The tears rose in Justinian's eyes, and gall embittered his heart. He bit his fingers to conceal the tremor of his lips, and then waving one hand bade Esther begone, with the promise that he would follow in a few minutes.

She accepted the dismissal and ran down the hill. She was wanted in her new home.

If it had not been that his father was bringing a new wife with him to Curgenven, Justinian would have been there to welcome him—nay, he would have run along the road to forestall his arrival. But now, as the boy said to himself, he would not be required. His father would not miss him. He would be so full of care and love for this woman that he would have no thought to spare for his son. He would show her the house, the gallery with the paintings and cabinets and tapestry, the family portraits, the conservatory, the garden. No, Justinian believed he would not be missed; if his father gave him a thought it would be mixed with self-congratulations that the lad was not about the place when he brought home his bride.

'I hate that woman,' muttered he, 'and so does Aunt Jane. I shan't go home till nightfall, and then I'll just creep up to my room and be seen of none. I don't want to meet her. And—I'll go to school or college, or to sea—anywhere to be away from what is no longer a home to me.'

CHAPTER XXX.

TAKE CARE!

The day was rapidly closing in. The tidings that the Tolmenna cottage had been unroofed and dismantled by Physic and a party of workmen had spread through the neighbourhood. Physic was no favourite, although the Moridegs were objects of mistrust rather than of favour, yet the fact that they were driven out of home—a home that had been theirs for three generations, a house that had been built by Roger's father—roused general sympathy, and when work was over many labourers came to volunteer their assistance to remove furniture and make habitable the cattle-shed that had been given up to the family for a temporary shelter. Happily no bullocks had been housed in the shed for a couple of years, so that it was in passably clean condition. But it was deficient in chimney, and the smoke escaped as best it could, and where it could. Fern and moss were collected and littered on the floor, and with the skill and ingenuity only possessed by men experienced to move great masses of stone, a slap of granite was placed on rollers, and, with crowbars, was easily run in at the door and planted as a hearth.

Good-humour, readiness to help, and mirth prevailed; even old Roger was roused out of his lethargy to share in the work of making the place habitable, and to loudly lament that his opportunity had been lost or neglected. On this string he harped incessantly; it was his one tune.

'Providence her gave us a chance, and us ungrateful creatures puts it aside. If I'd a-knacked Physic on the head wi' a stone, or skat his neddick wi' a stick, then Tolmenna 'ud 'a been standin' now, and 'ud 'a stood on for ages for Esther and her childer-vean' (little children).

'Joe,' said a workman to his fellow, 'I wouldn't be old Physic in a dark lane—nay, anywhere, when Uncle Roger be about wi' his gun, would you?'

'I reckon,' answered the man addressed, 'Physic will be going a bit too far some day, as he'll find to his cost.'

'Happen as will, and who'll be sorry?' observed the first.

The cottage was still without a window, for the farmer who owned the 'linney' objected to a hole being knocked through the walls. 'For sure,' said he, 'if you begin to knock a hole, all the walls 'll follow.' And Mrs. Morideg observed that none was needed. Sufficient light entered through the door for cooking purposes, and 'for what else, soas! can volks want light?'

Evening had closed, but not darkness, for the moon was at full and shone over the moors, lighting them almost as clear as day, turning the grey moss of Trewortha Marsh into a sheet of silver, so that it looked as if it had reverted to its ancient condition of lake. Far away on a great bank of moor the moon lit up a block of granite that went by the name of the 'Grey Mare,' and made of it as much a landmark by night as by day. One little orange star shone on the moorside from a lone cottage beyond the marsh (Colquite), where lived a solitary squatter.

The number of men had increased about the hovel, and a few women from the nearest farm and its cottages had also come to the spot to assist, or to comment on the proceedings. Justinian signed to Esther to accompany him to a distance from the throng.

'I am hungry,' said he. 'I have been working hard, and have been without food several hours. So have you, and I do not fancy the old folks have much provision. Come with me to "The Chough," Mrs. Penwarden will help. I'll get her to pack a basket with bread and cheese, and any cold meat she can spare; but first of all we must have something to eat ourselves, or we shall faint. I wish,' said Justinian, throwing up his head, 'that I hadn't spent all the money my father left me, or I would have rewarded the men all round for their help to-day.'

Esther accompanied him after she had searched for, and found, a basket that would serve her purpose among the goods transferred from Tolmenna.

There was frost in the air. The sky was clear, of silvery blue-grey, with here and there a suspicion of stars sparkling, then vanishing; on the granite-serrated crest of Kilmar a faint halo rested, the reflex of the western sky still flushing where the sun had gone down beyond Scilly. A plover uttered its plaintive cry at intervals. No sound of murmuring water reached the ear, as every stream was smothered in Trewortha Marsh.

Esther, whose rude nature, because rude, was responsive to every change in the scenery and atmospheric variation, but who, from her rudeness, could not express her sense of the beauty and solemnity of the scene by any expletives and exclamations, broke out into legend. 'They do say,' said she, 'that is, the ou'd folks, as there was a city over yonder as they ca'd Tresillan. There were a palace there, and a king, wi' a crown o' gould; ay! he wor a wicked sort o' man wi' no love for the poor in him. And they was a-keeping feast i' Tresillan. 'Twere the day o' the foundin' o' this city, and the king and all his great men and grand ladies wor sitting to table eatin' and drinkin' off dishes o' red gowld. Then there came to the hall a poor beggar-man a' i' rags, and he went up to the table and for the love o' God he asked as the king 'ud g'ie him a bit o' the meat off the dish. But the king he laughed, and sez he: "No, man, I want all for the lords and the ladies." Then he up an' asked for the bones as they had a' picked. "No, man," sez the king, "I want they for the dogs." Then the beggar-man he said as how he were nigh on dead wi' hunger, and he asked if the king 'ud gi'e him the gravy i' the dish. But the king he said, sez he: "Man, that

I want for the zoppin' o' my bread." "Then," sez the beggar-man, "g'ie me some o' thickey there crumbs you'm a-crumlin' in your fingers." "For sure I wi'n't," said the king; "I want they to feed the pigeons on the roof." Sure he said it. Then the beggar-man made bowlder still, and he went right on end up to the table, and sez he: "Gi'e me the dish." Thereat, I reckon, there rose a brave laugh from all the lords and ladies, for the dish here were o' red, red gowld. But the king, he were that angered, he up wi' the dish and he throwed her at the beggar-man, and the ou'd man fell down wi' the blood runnin' from his head. And afore he died he ill-wished the king and his castle, and his lords and ladies and servants all, and all the wicked city, that her shu'd go down un'ergrund, and be a marsh for ever.'

'You don't believe such rubbish, surely?'

'Hearken to the rest. Then the ou'd volks says that ever after there groweth i' the marsh a red sort o' a moss like blid' (blood), 'and there run'th a trickle o' ridom water like blid, and so it ever will in testimony to the same. I've zeed 'n. I've zeed 'n scoores o' times.'

'It's all nonsense,' said Justinian.

'You mun say so. But it's comfort, it be, to us poor folk to know that an ill-wish can do all that, when us be dringed up and trod down by the rich and mighty—such as by thickey king, and such as by Lawyer Physic. For sure sartain, if the ou'd beggar cou'd ill-wish the king and all the city and sink 'em in the marsh, my gran'mother can ill-wish and bring down into the dust that Lawyer Physic; and her'll do it too —no mistake. The Lord haan't gi'en us poor folk much, but he's gi'en us that—and us can do it—leastways gran'mother can, and her will.' After a few steps in silence, Esther continued: 'Folks do say that the red blid 'll rin, and the red moss stained in the blid 'll grow, till the Day o' Judgment, and then the city an' the king an' a' will come up out o' the marsh, an' then the ou'd beggar-man 'll hand up the dish and show his cracken crown and ask for judgment on the king, but the king 'll argie an' say he's been down in the meshes for hundreds o' hundreds o' years wi' his mouth full of ven water, and if that ain't judgment enough, then some volks be onraysonable, and I don't know nothing more about it.'

'These are old wives' tales,' said Justinian, 'and I don't heed them a bit. Let us talk of something else. I'm sorry to have to go to "The Chough" to get what is wanted, when I might go to Curgenven and take thence what is a hundred times better, but I have my reasons.' He shrugged his shoulders and swung his arms in a devil-may-care fashion, and continued, talking more to himself than to his companion: 'My father has gone and got married, and he's old enough to know better. I don't approve of these goings-on. If he'd had as much good feeling as you could pack into the heart of a mouse he'd have consulted me first. It's been a sneaking proceeding all through, and against my principles; he should have told me like a man what rigs he was up to, and looked me in the face, and not have shammed he was off to Scotland to see if he could find a good salmon river to hire for next spring. Salmon river indeed! I'll go home whistling with my hands in my pockets, as if I didn't care whether he brought home one wife or five hundred, like Solomon. I'll let him understand that I'll not be mothered by any of them.'

He talked with a swagger to hide his own uneasiness and distress—a distress that broke out in his heart whenever his mind recurred to home. He loved his father so deeply that he could not endure that there should be another intruded to share their love, and probably rob him of the best portion. As he thus spoke in braggart fashion he had forgotten the girl at his side, and thought only of himself and his father. But he came out of the lane upon the open space where stood a tavern, 'The Chough,' frequented by a few quarry and moor men, and by an occasional labourer from one of the farms. None of the usual guests were there this evening; all were engaged in assisting old Roger Morideg into his new cottage, or were looking on and passing their comments or giving their advice.

Justinian went in at the door and entered the low room that was lighted by a pendant oil lamp. He called to the landlady imperiously, told her what he wanted, and asked for some refreshment as speedily as it could be prepared. Then he threw himself on a bench and directed Esther to sit against the wall on the inside of the table opposite him.

Mrs. Penwarden was a tenant of the Curgenven estate, and willing to oblige. She was a hale, honest woman, with fresh colour, who could not only hold her own with her customers, but could turn out a disorderly fellow who had drunk too much and had become quarrelsome.

She looked hard at Esther, who had taken the place indicated, and had planted her bare elbows on the table and rested her chin in her palms. The light from the pendant lamp fell over her tumbled red hair and made dark shadows under her brows and a shade beneath the high and prominent cheekbones. A handsome, daring girl she seemed, whose only law was her own will, and whose will was as free, as vagrant, and at times as furious as the winds that swept the moor.

'I'll do you a rasher o' bacon and some eggs,' said Mrs. Penwarden, 'if you can wait a quarter of an hour.'

'Ay, do. Esther and I have eaten nothing. But first bring us some shandygaff to cool our fiery throats.'

'Have the old folks got in fitty-like?' asked the hostess.

'Pretty well,' answered Justinian. 'There are a score of helpers now. It was just at first there were none.'

Presently, when he could hear the fizzing on the fire of the broiling ham, Justinian rose and left the inn, saying that he would go and listen whether the ringers had tired of making fools of themselves, or whether they were still sounding a peal. 'I'll not go home,' said he, 'till those confounded bells have done.'

Whilst Justinian was intent listening to hear whether the silence were due to a pause or to the ringers having left their work, Mrs. Penwarden entered the room and threw a cloth over the table with a 'By your leave, Esther. Please lift them elbows a minute.' Then, leaning across the table, she said in a confidential tone: 'Esther, my dear, take care of yourself, and don't'y be made a fool of, like your mother.'

'What of my mother?'

'It's well meant, my dear,' said the good woman, seating herself in the place vacated by Justinian, 'so take it right from me. It don't seem fitty that you—the such as you, a Morideg—should be runnin' wild day and night wi' the young squire, and he a Curgenven.'

'Why not?'

'Why not, soas?' repeated Mrs. Penwarden with a Cornish interjection. 'For the best o' good reasons. If your mother had took a little more care of herself, you'd not be Esther Morideg, but be ca'd after your father and have him to look after you. Don't you be made a fool of for your own sake—no, nor yet for the young squire's sake, neither. He's a good young chap, but if ort were to come wrong 'twixt you and he 'twould be the worst as could hap to 'n for ever after. 'Twould be as a black blot again' his name, and nobody would say a word to 'n, and come nigh Curgenven.'

The girl looked steadily into the landlady's eyes. 'You know nort,' she said. 'He be bound to Miss Alice at the Tolmenna stone, that's fact.'

'No, my dear, don't'y think it. If Miss Alice was to hear what folks say—and they be beginning to talk already, so I bid'y be careful—her'd have nothing more to say to him.'

'Folks never say nothing.'

'Yes, they do; not much, but they be screwing up their eyes wi' looking at you both, and wondering what will come of it all. Do'y think they don't know where he's off to when he goes out on the moor? and a score o' times, when he's not going your way, folks think he is. Take you care, Esther. Your mother may have listened to some fine young gentleman—and he left her and a chil-vean, that is, wi' you—and you're Esther Morideg only.'

'What is that?' asked Justinian, entering. But he did not wait to have his question answered; he threw himself on the bench and said: 'I believe they're tired at last. Now, Mrs. Penwarden, is the rasher ready?' Justinian found Esther in no humour to eat or to speak. He insisted on her taking something, but he could hardly extract a word from her. She answered in monosyllables, and sat with her cheek resting in one hand and the other arm folded across her bosom. She had tucked up her short sleeves whilst at work, and had not lowered them; Justinian could not fail to observe and admire the beautiful moulding of her arms thus exposed. And now that her face was inclined, the light from above produced less hard shadows, it fell over her rounded cheek, and kindled her hair of copper sheen. By daylight the face lacked delicacy of texture in complexion and evenness of colour, but in the light from the lamp all such imperfections were lost, and Justinian found himself looking with admiration at Esther's beauty. She had her little finger curled over her lower lip; it was between her teeth, and she was biting it. He looked down abashed when he saw that her eyes were intently studying him.

When the basket was packed, Justinian and Esther rose, and he said: 'I'll go with you part way.'

'Nay; I can find my own road, thanky.'

'But I wish to. I shall carry the basket as far as the cross, where our paths separate. You'll not refuse me that, Esther?'

She made no reply, and they went forth into the moonlight. The Curgenven woods lay below, dark as ink in the silvered landscape, and the moonbeams were reflected as a star from the glass of the conservatory. The house itself could not be seen. Its back was towards the rising ground, and it was banked up in rear by noble beeches and sycamores.

Justinian walked in silence beside Esther through the lane which after about a mile led out upon the moor. The solemnity of the night, or some influence which neither understood, weighed on both, and made them indisposed to speak. They drew in with long breaths the pure air, and the moon cast their shadows in fantastic forms on the hedges of granite blocks that skirted their way.

Presently they reached an ancient cross of moorstone, rudely cut, one of the many similar monuments that abound in Cornwall. It marked a point where lanes diverged at the edge of the common. There Esther stood still. Justinian put down the basket and took both her hands in his. For a moment or two he stood there without speaking, a warm wave rushing through all his veins. Then he drew her towards him and kissed her lips.

Instantly she thrust him away. 'No!' she said. 'Not me—Alice.'

Her bosom heaved, and she gasped for breath.

'No!' she said, and she waved both hands before her, as though weaving some spell in the air. 'No. I wish you well! That is all. I wish you well!' Then she stooped, took up the basket and fled running, tripping over hummocks of furze, then relaxing her pace, and the tears coursed down her cheeks in the moonlight.

Justinian turned when she had disappeared over the hill, and uttered an exclamation. He saw his father!

CHAPTER XXXI.

A FATHER'S HEART.

The carriage that brought to Curgenven the newly-married pair passed under a triumphal arch that bore the inscription 'Welcome.' The arch had been set up by order of Mr. Physic, and without zeal by the gardener, who had received notice to quit. The woman at the lodge curtsied, but that was one of the conditions on which she occupied the cottage rent free. The five church bells were ringing, for the men who pulled the ropes expected to receive four shillings apiece for their trouble, as well as drink and cake.

A few villagers along the road to Curgenven had come to their doors and looked at the carriage as it rolled by, but had not waved handkerchiefs and cheered; had, in fact, exhibited no particular marks of interest in, and sympathy with, the event. For Mr. Physic had forgotten to remind the squire that the tenantry expected on such an occasion to be fed with roast beef, and their thirsty throats moistened with beer, on the terrace or in the avenue, at the expense of the lord of the manor. Mr. Percival had not thought of such a thing, not having been reared in the position of squire. Consequently, the general opinion of the people of Curgenven was that the new squire was 'no gentleman.'

Percival, in ignorance of the dissatisfaction with which he was regarded, yet wondering somewhat at the lack of enthusiasm with which he and his bride were received, had his head out of the carriage-window.

'I wonder where he is?' he asked. 'Theresa, look out on your side. I made sure he would have ridden to meet us, and have trotted back at our side. There he is—no, it is the butcher's boy. Do you fancy that he may have been walking, and we have whirled past without observing him?'

'He has not been on my side of the road,' answered Mrs. Curgenven.

'I hope the dear fellow is not unwell,' said Percival, withdrawing his head. 'But it is odd. It is unprecedented. I counted on his coming to meet us.' Then, after a little rumination, 'Surely he cannot have forgotten the day. He is thoughtless—as I have ever been.'

'There are the bells to remind him,' said Theresa.

'Ah! but he is a scatterbrain. He may think the ringers are practising.'

The carriage drew up at the main entrance to the Manor-House, and when Percival hastily worked at the carriage-door handle to get it open that he might dash out in quest of Justinian, he saw before him only Mr. Physic with a bouquet of hothouse flowers in his hand, and behind him the new domestics he had engaged in the place of those who had taken themselves off.

'I say, Physic, where is my boy?'

Percival had jumped out of the carriage and run up the steps, forgetful of his wife, whom he left to the groom to assist to dismount.

'On the moors, I fancy, sir.'

'He is not ill?'

'Oh dear no; in rude health.'

'Then why is he not here?'

Physic laughed, and then, passing Mr. Percival, stepped to Theresa, offered her the bouquet, and said with a bow and smile, 'Allow me to welcome to her home at last, Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

Mr. Percival having reached the hall, found Bathsheba, and at once shook her hand and asked: 'I say, Bath, where is Master Justin?'

The housekeeper replied that she thought Justinian had gone to the rectory, and then with the forwardness of an old servant, said, 'Go and see to the lady, master; the young gentleman will take care of himself.'

Percival accepted the admonition, and hastened to show more attention to his wife. He conducted her into the hall, and showed her up-stairs to her room. Then he ran off to the parsonage to inquire after his son. 'There will be time enough before Theresa is ready for something to eat.'

Percival arrived at the rectory, and rang the front door bell. The maid answered, and he inquired if Justinian were there. She believed not, but would go and inquire. Then Jane Curgenven, hearing the voice of Percival in the hall as she was descending the stairs, came to him and welcomed him graciously. She hoped he was well, and that the fresh pure air of Scotland had done him good; that he had been able to secure a river for salmon-fishing for the ensuing season. No—Justinian was not at the parsonage. He had been there, but had gone away again. She (Jane) believed that he had come to persuade Alice to go a ride with him, but she had been detained by her music-lesson, so that Justinian had been constrained to go without her.

Would Percival come in? Jane was dying to hear about her relatives at Drumduskie. What did he think of the place? Was he not charmed with the associations? How did he think the girls were looking? And Drumduskie himself; was he as much of a cockney as ever? It was the fashion of her family, out of Scotland, to disparage Mr. Boxholder.

Percival Curgenven would not sit down. He replied that he was going to dine, but that he was impatient to see his son, who carelessly, and without proper consideration, had absented himself. He asked how the boy was.

'Oh,' said Jane, 'he is flourishing. I cannot say that he shows much inclination for anything save sport. You really, Percival, must put him through the mill. With his position he must acquire the rudiments of scholarship. Surely you can spare us a few minutes. I am so anxious to learn your opinion of beautiful Drumduskie, and to hear whether any alterations have been made in the place. I wish you had seen it in spring. You had better come in. No! I don't think you are looking quite yourself. Tired with the journey? Well, it is a long way from town, and the trains do not always fit at Plymouth. It is vexatious to have to wait there when one is tired.'

Percival left the rectory with an oppression on his heart. Not by a word had Jane alluded to his wife. She had ignored his marriage, had addressed him as though he stood on the old footing, and no such person as Theresa had appeared at Curgenven to change relations. When he was back at the great house he found Physic there still; the agent wished to know whether Percival were satisfied with what had been done, and whether his services were further required.

'You had best stay and dine with us,' said Mr. Curgenven. 'Only *en famille*, of course, and no dressing. My wife and I are both tired and out of spirits, so you can enliven us. I wish Justinian were here. He is not at the parsonage.'

'No, sir,' said the agent; 'I informed you I had met him going to the moor.'

'Did you? I forgot. What is he gone there for?'

Physic laughed. Something in the tone of his laugh jarred the feelings of Percival, and he looked into his face.

'What do you mean, Physic?'

'Well, sir, now you ask me, I may as well tell you. The young fellow goes a great deal too often to the Moridegs'.'

'Oh, that old Roger will do him no harm.'

'No; not Roger, though he is a jail-bird.'

'You made him a jail-bird, Physic, I suppose. He was a harmless enough old fellow. As for his wife, she's a witch, but I don't fear her and her evil eye.'

'The young one's witchcraft is the most dangerous, and a loving eye is more mischievous than an evil one.'

'What do you mean, Physic?'

'I only repeat what I have heard. Mr. Justinian goes to the Tolmenna hut a great deal. Now I have had that pulled down, as it is on a property I have bought, and I suppose the Moridegs are all over the place, without a home to shelter them. There is no saying what your son may be doing in his chivalry to help them.'

'Stuff! I'll hear nothing of this,' said Percival Curgenven irritably. 'You shall stay for dinner, but enough of this scandal. I don't believe a word.'

However, the hint had lodged like a barbed arrow in the heart of the father, and had redoubled his uneasiness. The day had closed in, and still Justinian had not appeared.

When Percival had returned to the house, he ran up-stairs to wash his hands and change his coat for dinner, and had met his wife on the stairs descending. She looked pale and somewhat weary, but she had a smile on her lips. She had dressed hastily, put a flower in her bosom and another in her dark hair of so deep a crimson that it showed her pallor. She extended her arms to meet her husband.

'Percy,' said she, 'you have not welcomed me home.'

He coloured and stammered.

'Really, dear Theresa, I am ashamed. It is not my fault; that confounded monkey, Justin, is to blame. Fancy that fellow running off to the moors when his father comes home. It is too bad, and it has upset me.'

She put up her hands, drew his face down to hers, and gently caressing his cheek, said, 'Of course I forgive you. How could I do other—when you have given me a home, oh, and such a home! Dear! I have taken my candle and been round it.' Then she kissed him, and passed on the stairs continuing her descent.

The gong sounded for dinner whilst Percival was changing his boots. He came down as quickly as he could, and found his wife and Physic in the drawing-room awaiting him. During the meal he left the agent to carry on the conversation with Theresa. He was absent, listening for the foot of his son in the hall, and wondering that he did not return. If he joined in the conversation it was for but a moment, and then his mind wearied of whatever topic was discussed, and reverted to Justinian. He imagined that some accident might have befallen him, and then the hint thrown out by Physic disturbed him in no less degree.

He caught Theresa's eye repeatedly resting on him. She knew what was troubling his thoughts, and destroying his zest for his dinner, for his wine, for the talk about the place and its affairs, the neighbourhood, and the petty incidents that had occurred during his brief absence.

At length, when the dessert was laid, he stood up, the anxiety had become unendurable, and he asked Theresa and Physic to excuse him, he must go and look for Justinian.

'Let me go,' said the agent. 'I dare be sworn I know where to find him.'

'No,' said Percival hastily, and his brow contracted. 'No, Physic, you remain here and amuse Mrs. Curgenven; I must go after the truant myself. You will not be vexed with me, Theresa, will you?'

'No, dear, assuredly not.'

He went forth into the beautiful moonlit night, and, as we have seen, by accident took the right instead of the wrong lane that led forth upon the moor. The lanes that conducted to the waste were all provided with gates to prevent the wild ponies and cattle from straying into cultivated land and losing themselves among the roads. One of these gated lanes led by 'The Chough,' and at 'The Chough' he chanced to inquire, and thus learned that Justinian had gone part way to Trewortha with the girl Morideg. He followed, and arrived at the cross just as the young couple parted.

'Justin, my boy! What is the meaning of this?'

The lad was taken aback, and did not at once reply.

'Justin, I don't like this. Why are you away from home, and out and rambling the lanes with a common village girl?'

'She is not and never was a village girl,' answered Justinian, recovering himself; 'she is a wild moor colt, that is all. What have you against her?'

'Nothing. I have something against you. It is not right for you——'

'Father, *honi soit qui mal y pense*. The Moridegs have been bundled neck and crop out of their house by that rascal Physic—I wonder why you employ him!—and I have been helping to house the homeless—a work of mercy, father.'

'It does not look well.'

'Alice likes her, so do I, and she loves us both, for on my honour, I believe we are the only people in the world who care for her, beside old Roger and her grandmother.'

'Well, well!—more of this another time. I have another crow to pluck with you.'

Justinian guessed what his father meant. He was silent for a minute or two, walking beside him. Then he said abruptly: 'It's no good your asking me to do it. I cannot call her my mother, and I won't. I love my own dear mother—and love to hear you talk of her, and tell how good she was. I can't take this strange woman into my heart, as you have done.'

'I do not ask you to do that,' said Mr. Curgenven, standing still and looking in the face of the tall, handsome boy, lit by the full lustre of the moon. And as he looked he saw in the eyes, in the brow, in all the upper part of the face, the likeness to his first wife. Percival Curgenven heaved a sigh. 'No, Justin, I do not ask you not to continue to love, I do not wish you for a moment to forget your dear dead mother. I do not forget her, I do not cease to love her. But, my boy, you are old enough to know that such an establishment as Curgenven cannot be managed by old Bathsheba. She has kicked over the caldron already. I must have some one competent to manage. I do not ask you to love my present wife in any degree as you do your own dead mother, but you must honour her as you regard me.'

'Yes, father,' said Justinian, subdued, 'I will do my best. Do you think she really cares for you, or has only taken you for your money?'

'I am sure she loves me.'

'If she is good to you, I shall respect her. There—I promise that.'

'Do you consider, my boy,' continued Mr. Curgenven, 'that you have given me great pain to-day?'

'How so?'

'In absenting yourself on my arrival. It was a slight to my wife, and a cruel blow to me. You little know how you have hurt me.'

'Father!'

The lad threw his arms round Mr. Curgenven's neck. 'I am sorry. I was wrong; I was very wrong.'

'And now—one word, Justin, more. You say that your love is to your mother. Let the remembrance of her accompany you always when you are with that girl Esther.'

The lad squeezed his father's hand. He looked up in his father's face and said, 'I was foolish. For one moment a warmer thought came over me than I ought to have held, and I kissed her. I will not do it again. I promise you, father—by my thoughts and love of my mother.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

A MENACED HOME.

When Percival left the dining-room, he begged Physic to excuse him, and remain with the wine as long as he liked. Mrs. Curgenven withdrew to the drawing-room. There the candles had been lighted in sconces on the wall, and a brisk bright fire was burning in the grate.

Theresa sank into an arm-chair before the fire.

The drawing-room was singularly beautiful; it was in white and gold, with a painted ceiling, and with charming Watteau subjects in panels on the walls. The room was lofty, curtains and furniture of turquoise-blue silk. Choice flowers from the greenhouse were arranged in every available vase and glass, and exhaled a delicate fragrance. The room was cheerful at night. There was a cut-glass chandelier in the midst, pendent from the ceiling. It was not lighted, but it reflected the twinkle of the fire and the flames of the candles on the walls.

Theresa was in a dark dress, the only dark object in this sparkling apartment.

As she sank into the easy-chair she uttered a sigh of satisfaction. At length she had found rest.

She looked dreamily into the fire, and her past unfurled before her. Never, from her infancy, had she possessed a home of her own. As a young girl she had lived on the charity of the kind old lady who had adopted her. On the death of Mrs. Fenton she had been cast adrift on the world, and when married hastily, it was not to be given a home by her sailor husband, but to be lodged in hotels and pensions, till he deserted her. After that her career had been varied and her fortune had been chequered. But never once in all the variations and chequerings had the time and chance come to her when she could call a space within four walls—her home. Except her little desk of inlaid olive-wood, she had nothing that she could regard as permanently her own. Boxes, portmanteaus had been worn out with much travelling, dresses changed, little articles of jewellery had been got rid of in times of need. Only that small desk and the letters and other trifles it contained had remained to her of the past, and might alone have remained hers till her dying hands let go their clasp of it.

But now Percival Curgenven had given her a home—a beautiful home that had legitimately been hers for many years, but which had been usurped by another.

She turned her large dark eyes round and looked at every object in this fair parlour. She had excellent taste and she fully appreciated the beauty. But hardly as fully could she realize that it was her own. That chair in which she sat was her own now. And hitherto she had never even possessed a chair that was hers. Those she had rested in had been let with the lodgings, or were the furniture of the hotel. She put her hands to the soft silken arms of the chair and clasped them, to feel that they were realities. She stood up, and walked round the room, touching the various objects, and whispering to herself, 'And this also is mine.' The flowers were from her conservatory. The old Sèvres and Dresden china belonged to her. She looked up at the painted ceiling. Cherubs were represented there flying, strewing flowers, and unrolling a scroll on which was inscribed the family motto, 'Tandem.'

'Tandem,' repeated Theresa after she had read it. 'At last! Yes—that is my motto; at last I have a home, at last rest, at last no concern for the morrow what it may bring forth.'

On a table was a little fan of white ivory delicately pierced, with the silk web adorned with spangles: one of the fans that were fashionable at the beginning of this century, fans to sparkle under sparkling chandeliers, fanning ladies in dresses of white gauze broidered with sparkling bugles.

Theresa took it up without much thought; opened and closed it, and returned with it in her hand to her seat before the fire. There she sat, not leaning back, but forward, with her head lightly bowed, looking into the fire, with the fan on her knees. Occasionally feeling inconveniently hot from the glow in the grate she unfurled the fan, and then let it fall together again, fold on fold, unconscious that it was closing, so abstracted was she in her thoughts.

She knew very well that her position would be a difficult one. She was without a friend near—a relative she had never to her knowledge had. By education and in feeling she was a lady, with the tastes, the instincts, the tact, the tenderness of a lady; but she was well convinced that her claim to be one would be disputed. She had been on the stage. What was to be expected of an actress? It was true that she had appeared on the boards in subsidiary characters, and for a very brief period indeed; nevertheless the fact remained, that she had been an actress. She had sung as a professional performer in concerts and oratorios. To have exercised a profession at all would damn her in many eyes. She had been a governess, and a governess in a family connected with the Curgenvens. She had—as she knew it would be put—occupied a menial position; and that it had been menial she could not deny. Finally there remained the fact that she was by birth worse than a nobody.

She had told everything to Percival. Percival could never reproach her with having hid aught from him. But she doubted whether she had done right in accepting him—not for her own sake but for his. He had been told that he had best marry some one with an established position and with relatives, but he had persisted in taking her. Ought she not, for the sake of him, and as a return for his generous love, to have persisted on her side in refusing him? Then she asked herself—could she have borne to have gone on with such a life as had been hers, when the chance of leaving it had been given her? She gave a gasp, and looked hurriedly round, unfurled the fan once more, and again settled into thought.

Would it matter to her very greatly if the neighbourhood gave her the cold shoulder? She cared little or nothing for the position in society she had acquired, what she did value was the substantial reality of a home free from sordid money cares, that could not be taken from her—that none could dispute. As for social intercourse with the county people and parsons' wives, she did not suppose that it would prove to her a rich gain if she obtained it, or a sensible loss if she were denied it. The great smothering sand-dune of common-place rolls over the coast-land and destroys all vegetation save the wiry grass and thistle that spring out of the poorest soil. There are those dunes in all spheres of life, in all much the same, and all equally sterile, all equally impatient of any form of life save the meanest and most vulgar.

Suddenly, with a shiver that thrilled her entire frame, Theresa started out of her dream, looked over her shoulder, and uttered a cry of terror; then recovered herself and said, 'I beg your pardon, Mr. Physic. I did not hear you enter—and I thought I saw a ghost.'

'I hope I am not intruding.'

'Not at all,' she said coldly.

'Mr. Curgenven will not be back for some time, not if he is sweeping the moors for that scapegrace son of his, who will give him trouble enough and to spare before many years are over. In the meanwhile, till his return, I should like a few words with you, madam.'

With her fan Theresa wearily indicated a chair.

Something in her gesture, in her expression of face, in the tone of her voice, angered the agent, and instead of seating himself he took hold of the chair, turned it round, and leaning an elbow on the back, and planting a knee on the seat, said, 'Madam! so you think I am now nothing; that I am only your humble servant, to be ordered about, and bid send in my bill for work done, and have the odd pence struck off in the cheque that pays me?'

Theresa looked at him in surprise.

'Oh yes!' sneered he, 'you act your part well, my lady! You have stepped from the stage to the dress-circle, and think to spurn me, do you—eh?'

Theresa saw that he had been drinking, not enough to make him tipsy, but enough to give him insolence. She said, 'I shall leave the room, Mr. Physic.'

'You shall not,' he replied; 'I will bar your way.'

'Then I shall ring to have you ejected.'

'Oh yes! I like that! Have *me* ejected; *you* eject me! And do you know that I hold you, body and soul, in the hollow of my hand?'

Theresa put her hands on the elbows of her chair to raise herself. Physic at once discovered her object, and swinging round the chair on which he leaned, he stepped forward and put his hand on her arm, forcing her back in her seat.

'No,' said he, 'you shall not ring the bell. I advise you to listen to what I have to say. We must understand one another. You have had to listen to plain speeches in your life more than once. You were not born to be wrapped in cotton-wool from every breath of cold, and have a gold spoon put to your mouth with sugared pap.'

'I have had to put up with a great deal of impertinence and vulgarity, as you say,' answered Theresa, raising the fan.

'Yes,' said he, 'I understand what that fan means. You gave me a rap across the back of my hand with the reins once. And you are ready to do it again. But don't be afraid of me. I have something to tell you that will astonish you, but I will not step another inch nearer to you than this—and see, I put the chair between us again.' He resumed his first position.

'Then be good enough to say what must be said in the fewest possible words.'

'As you will, madam.' He rested his chin in his hand, and kneeling on the torquoise-blue seat of his chair looked hard at her. 'Humph! I did not know you were striking at higher game when you refused my honourable offer. But let me tell you, that clever as you have been in bringing down your quarry, you have made one fatal blunder. Do you remember that paper you put into my hands when you were in the bungalow?'

Theresa started.

'Do you remember what was endorsed on it? That it was the will of Captain Lambert Curgenven? And that it was to be used or suppressed according as I thought good?'

Theresa nodded slightly. Her heart began to beat with real alarm.

'Very well, madam,' pursued the agent, 'you never committed a greater folly in your life than when you put that paper into my hands. When you delivered that to me, you delivered yourself also, body and soul, to me. Look about you. That's a pleasant fire, is it not? That's a handsome, sparkling chandelier, ain't it? This is a pretty room, with its white and gold and blue, is it not? You think it is all yours, don't you? It is yours as long as I let you enjoy it; not an hour longer. You talk of ejecting me from the house! Why, madam, it is I who can eject you and your husband and his precious cub any day. I have the lever which will tumble you all down, and that lever you put into my palm—fool that you were.'

Physic was silent, and gazed with evil triumph on Theresa, who looked at him with large dazed eyes, half rising in her seat, the fan fallen at her feet.

'Shall I tell you what that will contains which is now in my charge, to use or not to use as seems best to me? By that will, which is the only one ever made by Captain Lambert after his marriage with Miss Jane Pamphlet, and which was no marriage at all, as you were alive, he acknowledges the invalidity of the marriage and bequeaths all his estate in trust to Miss Jane Pamphlet, commonly known as Mrs. Lambert Curgenven, and to Mr. Percival Curgenven, in trust, I say, for his natural daughter, Alice Pamphlet, commonly known as Alice Curgenven. Now—how do you relish that, madam? Have I not in my hands something that can deal you a sharper rap than the reins in your hand dealt to me? Can't I hurt you a good deal more than you hurt me, when you said, "I reject your offer, I won't be Mrs. Physic," a respectable man's wife in a good business?' He chuckled and rubbed his hands together over the chair-back.

'I will speak of this to my husband,' said Theresa in a tremulous voice, and put her hand to her head, where the pulses were throbbing as though to burst. A few minutes ago she was congratulating herself that she had at length found a home, certain to be hers for the remainder of her days, and already the insecurity of her hold on it was revealed. She had craved for and found rest, but only for a few moments. She was again thrown back into the whirlpool of contending currents, in which she must continue to battle for existence.

'No,' answered Physic, 'I forbid you to speak to Mr. Percival on the subject. You are a woman of the world and I am a man of the world—and we understand that with a certain class of people we must deal according to their folly. Your husband is one of those fly-away, romantic, up-on-top-of-a-pole folk. If he knew about this he would throw up the whole concern, and then where would he be, and his dearly beloved cub, Justinian, and you, my lady, who have spread your nets so cleverly? No, if you dare to speak to him of this, then the game is up. You need not unpack your travelling trunk; it is waste labour to take out the new dresses you bought, or had given you, in town, and fold them in drawers or bury them in wardrobes. Alter the direction from Curgenven House to the Pill-box, and send for a cab to remove you and your effects as soon as may be. But mind you, Mr. Percival will owe to the estate every penny that has been drawn from it since he came here. He will have to pay back what he took for all the presents he made you, for the marriage licence, for everything, and you know well that will leave him something worse than a beggar. He is not the man to think of all this; we must think and provide for him. Upon my word! That will be a come-down off his tall perch, to have to retreat with humiliation to the Pill-box again, and to have all the newly-engaged servants clamouring in his ears for their wages, and not have a penny in his pocket wherewith to satisfy their demands. Who can say whether the Pill-box is available to receive him again? I suppose he gave notice to surrender his tenure, and it may be let. Then whither is he to go to hide his head? How do you think he will relish the exchange into poverty from wealth—from being a somebody to sink into a nobody again? You may take my word for it, without counting the cost, he will throw up all if we allow him, and then in will march my Lady Jane and smoke all the rooms to disinfect them, polluted by your presence, and won't she pirouette on stilts at your downfall!'

'Where is this will you speak of?'

'I have it in my desk in my office.'

'I should wish to see it.'

'I will bring you a copy.'

'I do not desire a copy. I must see the original. Bring it here.'

'No, thank you. If you want to see it, you must come to Liskeard and see it in my office.'

'I will do so. Now leave me.'

Mr. Physic left, and Theresa fell back in her chair, and let her arms drop by her side. She was as one stunned by a blow on the head. For some moments she could neither think nor feel. Consciousness departed, and all was dark before her eyes.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PAX ALL ROUND.

When the light returned to Theresa's eyes, and the blood began once more to circulate in her veins, she saw Percival stooping over her, but it was some moments before she could realize who it was.

'My dear,' he asked, 'what is it? Are you overdone?'

She tried to smile to reassure him, but her muscles had not recovered sensibility.

He was alarmed. 'What has happened?' he asked. 'Do speak, Theresa. Have you fainted?'

Then with a gasp life returned, and she threw her arms round his neck and drew his head down to her face. Her cheek was cold, and a tear was on it like a drop of ice.

In his uneasiness when he studied her countenance, he saw how sunken were the eyes, and he kissed her face.

'Are you very ill?—do tell me, my dear! How has this come on you?'

'I shall be better directly,' she said, now panting for breath as though she had run a long way.

'Look, Theresa, here is Justinian,' said Percival Curgenven; 'the fellow has been found at last. I have brought him home, and now he desires to pay you his respects. But you are too tired, too ill—now.'

'No,' she said, recovering herself, and catching at the chance of diverting the current of her thoughts into another channel. 'No; where is he?'

Justinian stepped forward. He had entered the drawing-room rather sheepishly, following his father, and had stood with his lips curled contemptuously at the endearing terms of his father addressed to Theresa, and had turned his head aside in disgust when she put her arms round her husband's neck.

Justinian had made up his mind during the walk home at his father's side, as to the line he would adopt, as to the limits of his concession. He would be respectful and gracious to his step-mother as the wife of his father.

He was, however, resolved to let her clearly understand that he tolerated her presence in the house and accepted her as the companion of his father, much as he would accept a new spaniel or a parrot that his father had chosen to bring home as a pet. He would give her to understand that it would be lost labour for her to attempt to gain his esteem, let alone his affection; that he did not harbour resentment towards her for having dared to step into that place which had once been occupied by his own mother, but that he would cover over his sentiments with a decent veil so as not to distress his father. But if, at any time, she attempted to sow discord between him and his father, then he would be free to express his opinions, and show his sentiments without reserve. It was advisable, nay, it was necessary, that the conditions of peace should be concluded at once; and Justinian desired to have a few words with the new Mrs. Curgenven, without the privity of his father. As Percival stood aside, Justinian advanced with a toss of his head and a swing in his walk, that, had Theresa been in a condition to observe him, would have told her at a glance how reluctant the boy was to come to an amicable arrangement.

'I am very sorry,' said he, awkwardly, 'that I was the cause of the accident when your collar-bone was broken.'

'Oh!' answered Theresa, with a smile, 'that was what brought your father to me, it was a happy accident to me.'

Justinian frowned and screwed up his lips. If it were so, then he had double cause to regret that the confounded fire-balloon was carried against the head of Mr. Physic's cob.

The shadow of his father had been on Theresa, now Mr. Curgenven stepped to the table, and the light from the candles on the mantelpiece fell on her face and revealed the worn, distressed expression, the lustrous eyes, the dark rings about them, and the paleness. The face was still beautiful, though youth had passed, and it wore at this moment a look of pleading pathos.

'I'm blessed!' said Justinian to himself. 'The poor devil *is* ill!'

Theresa held out her hand to the young fellow, and Justinian placed his in hers, coldly, with his fingers limp as strips of leather.

She did not appear to notice his lack of response, and retained his hand.

'I should like,' she said, turning her head towards her husband, 'I should like to have Justin here all to myself for a few minutes, between four eyes, as the Germans say.'

'Certainly, my dear, if you are sufficiently recovered for a talk. I'll go and look up Physic, and see whether my wine has sent him a dive under the table, or whether he has driven home. I have a few odd matters about which to talk to him.'

Then Mr. Curgenven left the room.

There was a stool under a little table near Theresa's chair. She pointed to it with her foot and said, 'Would you mind drawing that up close, and sitting on it?'

The lad shuffled uneasily and made no attempt to comply with her request. He would not sit at her feet—at her feet indeed! at her feet! What are we coming to next! She'd be ordering him about, make him say his catechism, bid him hold the wool whilst she unwound the skein! Bid him stick his ears under the cap lest they should protrude!

He answered somewhat sternly, 'I'd rather stand; I am not at all tired.'

'It was not for your sake—it was for mine I asked it,' said Theresa gently. 'I wished to study your face more closely. You have your mother's eyes and brow exactly. I am not surprised at your father loving you so dearly.'

'You knew my mother?'

A little contraction—a little life in the hand she held.

'To be sure I did. Has not your father told you so? I nursed her in her last illness. It was very sad to be ill to death in a Californian hotel, with folk coming and going, drinking, dancing, noise—and she——' Theresa studied his face, and then said, 'I wish you would stoop, just to be kind and oblige me. It is your mother, your sweet mother, I am looking at in you. Justin—I held her poor hand as I hold yours now, held it when burning with fever, and held it as it grew cold in death.'

His fingers were trembling in hers, and he drew them hastily away lest she should notice it.

Then he bent on one knee, so as to place his face on a level with hers, and let her lay her hands on his shoulders.

'I hope it will be a bond between us,' said Theresa, 'that we both loved her, though you do not remember her—or hardly so—yet you love her, and so did, and so do I.'

'I think I can remember something about her.'

'Yes, but you were very young. Do you know, I received almost her last kiss. Not her last—that was for you. I had you in my arms and brought you to her, and held you over the bed to her. Then she put up her lips and touched with them this hand.'

She removed her right hand from Justinian's shoulder. He took it at once, held it, and his mouth quivered. He wished to kiss where his mother had kissed, but his pride intervened and he let go her hand again.

'I will tell you some day all that I can remember about her; but I knew her only when she was weak and ill. I never saw her in her full strength and beauty. And that which is a bond between you and me is a bond also between your father and me.'

'Do you talk to him about my mother?'

'Indeed I do. You need not think, Justin, that any love he may feel for me will diminish that he ever bears in his heart for her who was his first love. Love is not a stream which if diverted to water this field and that field is exhausted and leaves its bed dry. Nor is it soil that if it grow one crop is fatigued and cannot produce another. It is like the inexhaustible sun that can flood many with its light, and quicken them with its warmth, and each does not rob the other of what is his share. It is like the mighty ocean that can roll round and bathe many islands, and it is always the same wide and deep sea to one and all.'

A wonderful softness and sweetness was in her face as she spoke, it was as though some of the light and heat of that sun, some of the depth and saltness of that ocean, were in the solemn dark eyes fixed on the boy, out of whose features all the hardness had gone, from whose lips the defiance had faded, and from whose eyes the antagonism had disappeared.

'You ran away to-day, Justin, because you hated to see me arrive. Was it not so?'

The lad coloured and hung his head.

'I know it was so; and I honour you for the chivalrous hold on the memory of your mother. You thought I would blur that over in the heart of your father, and that I might in some way turn away his love from you.'

'Yes—it was so,' said Justinian.

'You were mistaken in thinking this. If we live together long, you will find how greatly you have been mistaken. I have but one object now in life, and that is to make your father happy, who has done so much for me; and I knew he could not be happy were there anything of estrangement between him and you. He could not love me if he thought I, in any manner, drew a bunch of nettles between himself and you. I believe it was the thought of your mother, the delight of having some one to speak to who remembered her, that brought about his entertaining some liking for me. For in me there was nothing else. I have neither youth nor looks——'

'Oh, step-mother, you are beautiful.'

'No, Justin, I am past the turn of life, and am withering slowly away. I am even past the time when jealousy affects me; as to yourself, I shall never rob you of any of your father's love. To-day he forgot me, he left me, so unhappy was he because you were away, and he ran off to find you without giving me another thought. This did not make me jealous. On the contrary, it made me admire and love your father all the more. It showed me what a depth of tenderness, what a strong, tough endurance of love there was in his heart, that makes him cling to one whom he loves and who belongs to him. I hope that I shall win in time some such deep strong love for myself. It is worth having. It is worth devoting one's life to deserve it. Do not undervalue it, Justin.'

The boy drew the stool from under the table, seated himself on it, and leaning his cheek on the arm of Theresa's chair looked up into her face. He had forgotten his mistrust, lost his dislike for her.

'I should wish to ask you something,' she said.

'Ask me what you will, step-mother.'

'Do you suppose your father would be content to return to the old house and manner of life?'

'What—to that beastly Pill-box? I should just think not.'

'Is he happy here in this grand mansion?'

'Of course he is. You wouldn't like to have to go back to Miss Treise, the milliner's little lodgings over the shop, would you, now?'

'No, perhaps not.'

'I should say most certainly not.'

'But,' continued Theresa, 'your father was never the man to value splendour and comforts.'

'Because he never had the chance of enjoying them. He had to manage to get along as best he might in old days. He didn't like it, but he couldn't help it. Now it's quite another matter. By Jove!' exclaimed the boy, 'if I thought it was all up with us here, and we had to quit, I'd cut my stick and be off out of the country, anywhere. I wouldn't show my face in Liskeard, no, nor in England; having been a young squire once, I couldn't come down.'

'You are confident your father likes his present condition? He grumbles a good deal about it.'

'Oh, that's his way. Of course he likes to be a J.P. and a squire, and to be able to give a fellow shooting and fishing over his property and in his waters, and to have money in his pocket instead of a hole. Only he doesn't care to show how it pleases him. That's all.'

Justinian considered a moment, then laughed and said, 'And what's as jolly as anything is to be able to order that chap Physic about, and have him awfully civil, instead of being patronized by him as we were before. He is a cad, and I hate him.'

Justinian drummed with his fingers on the chair. Then he said, 'What do you think, step-mother, that Physic has been about? He has turned the Moridegs out of their house, has torn the roof off and pulled down the walls.'

'Who are the Moridegs?'

'Oh! don't you know? Old Roger knocked Physic down when he was told that he was to be turned out of house and home by him, and so Physic sent him to prison. He is quite an old chap and perfectly harmless. His wife is a queer creature, people think her a white-witch and that she has the evil eye, but I don't hold with all that stuff.'

'Have they a family?'

'N—no, not exactly. There's a grandchild, you know. It's an awful shame, and that is one reason why I have been away from Curgenven to-day. I have been seeing these poor old creatures under shelter. Physic would have let them starve and die of exposure on the moor.'

'And Mr. Physic, if he could, would turn us out, you and your father and me, turn us out of this beautiful house.'

'I have no doubt about it,' answered Justinian with vehemence. 'Not a shadow of a doubt about it. The joy and fun is—he can't.'

'I hope not.'

'I am sure he cannot. By Jove, if I thought he could I'd knock him down as old Morideg did, if I had to go to gaol for it. I'd go and sing praises there, as Paul and Silas did.'

'He shall not do it,' said Theresa in a low tone. 'No, he shall not do it.'

Then Mr. Curgenven came in. He looked surprised to see his rebellious boy sitting familiarly by Theresa's side—close to her, playing with her fan that he had picked up from the floor.

'Physic is gone,' said Percival Curgenven. 'He'll have to come out again and see me, I suppose. It is foolish of him to leave without a word.'

'But it is late, Percival, and he has a long drive. How was he to know when you would be returning home? I rather want to go into Liskeard in a day or two, and then I can take him a message from you.'

'That will do. Well! how do you and Justin get on together? Patched up any little disagreements, I hope.'

'We are very good friends,' said Theresa.

'We are the best of friends,' said the boy, standing up; 'and, I say, governor, you might have done worse: as stepmothers go, you couldn't have done better—so Pax all round, I say.'

CHAPTER XXXIV

IN THE OFFICE.

The town of Liskeard is a strange one. The first question the visitor asks is: 'What can have brought it there?' It does not occupy the ridge or spur of a hill, as one that has gathered round a border castle; it does not occupy a valley by a river, as one that has nestled about an abbey; it is not planted at a convergence of roads, as one that lives and thrives on commerce. It consists of a multitude of houses tumbled promiscuously over steep hill and narrow dale, so that the chimneys of one house throw their smoke in at the windows of another, and a street is as contorted literally as a letter S, and undulates vertically as a switch-back railway.

The reason why Liskeard is a town, and was planted where it is, must be sought down a narrow lane that leads to a great unfailing, limpid spring, pouring forth a flood of the purest water through four orifices. The old British saints loved to settle by springs of water, and there is hardly a church in Cornwall that is not associated with a holy well. No well in the county is so copious, so marvellous in its unfailing supply, as that of Liskeard. It may have received divine homage in pagan times; it certainly received consecration by some shaggy Celtic hermit; he settled by it, wrought miracles with its water, and his cell became the nucleus of a town.

In an old slated house in one of the tortuous streets of Liskeard lived Mr. Physic, solicitor and property agent. Any one who has been into a lawyer's office anywhere in that world that supports lawyers knows them all. They are as alike as dried peas. Some have more iron cases, lettered with the initials or names of clients, than have others, some have the table more littered with correspondence and half-endorsed deeds than others, but all have the same look, the same smell, the same character.

Mr. Physic had just risen from his desk to take some midday refreshment—a glass of sherry and sandwiches—when the clerk showed in Mr. Pike, the horsebreaker.

'How d'y do?' said the agent cheerily. 'And how's the missus and all the babbies?'

'Very well, thank you, sir, very well. We're all tough, thanks be.'

'Take a chair,' said Physic; 'come at an opportune moment. Just had my humble lunch brought in. Let me pour you out a glass of sherry.'

'No, thank you, sir,' said the horsebreaker, taking a seat. He wanted a glass of wine, he intended to have it, but he knew what good manners were, and required to be pressed.

'Now, come,' said the solicitor. 'You have been engaged with a skittish horse, I can see; look a little pulled about, you do. By name I am allied to the medical profession, so let me prescribe.'

'Thank you, sir, I feel hearty. I never drink before I eat.'

'Then eat, Pike, at once. Here are sandwiches.'

'I wouldn't deprive you.'

'Not deprive me at all. I will ring for more. Now, a glass?' holding the decanter in the position of the earth as it rotates round the sun.

'I really had rather not.'

'Half a glass?'

'Well, then, as you are so pressing, half a glass.'

'Very well, only a half.'

So Mr. Physic filled it, so as not to run over; that made half a glass; a glass that overflows is a whole glass. After Pike had eaten a sandwich and drunk his glass, the agent put his head on one side and said suppliantly: 'Come, let me pour you out another.'

'Not on any account.'

'I insist.'

'Well, there is a crumb in my windpipe—a drop—not above a drop.'

So his glass was replenished.

'Now, then,' said Physic, 'what is the business, Pike?' But just as the lawyer had hung back before asking this question, so now did the horsebreaker hang back from answering it.

'Look there,' said Pike, pointing to a dog on the mat by the fire-place. 'That poor brute has got the distemper. I'll tell you what you should do with her. Give her some wine. She's running at the eyes and nose. If you don't take care you'll lose her. Give her sherry with syrup of squills and camphor-water. That will bring her round like the minute-hand of a clock.'

'I'll do it,' said Physic. 'Now to business. I'm your man.'

'You don't notice any smell, do you?' asked the horsebreaker.

'No, Pike; why?'

'Because there's a man selling real fresh bloaters, and I bought a few and have them here. My wife can't touch red salt herrings; they give her heartburn. But the real fresh bloater is another thing. The man has a cart-load. I'd have more if I wasn't riding.'

'Well; now to business.'

'Very well, sir.' Pike touched his forehead. 'It's only about a little field and a stable, you know, sir, that Matthew Kneebone had.'

'Oh, you can't have those; they are to be thrown into Philip Downe's lot.'

'It would be uncommon convenient for me.'

'Convenient or not, it can't be helped. I believe Mr. Curgenven has as much as promised it.'

'But I want a paddock, and that stable comes in terrible handy for me.'

'There are difficulties.'

'I dare say there be. But I want that paddock and linney uncommon bad. And, look here, Lawyer Physic, I don't mind a couple of guineas; and I'll give you a bit of advice as may be useful.'

'Oh, advice!'

'Why I reckon if I came to you for advice I'd have to pay six-and-eight for it.'

'Yes, but I am a solicitor.'

'Well, and I am a man who has his eyes and ears open. And the bit o' advice I can give you may be worth many scores of six-and-eightpences. Take the two guineas'—he put the money, two sovereigns and two shillings, on the table—'and my advice, which is worth more nor that, and manage for me the paddock and the stable.'

'Very well, then,' said Physic, drawing the money to him. 'Now for the advice.'

'They say you're going to open a mine at Tolmenna.'

'Yes, I am.'

'You'll like to go there and look about, and see how the mine gets along.'

'Of course.'

'Then I just wouldn't.'

'Why so?'

'Well, you shouldn't go without some one to be along with you. There's that ou'd chap Morideg, as you sent to prison and turned out o' his house. He ain't gone so terrible far, He's at that wisht place now, Smallacomb, by the Trewortha Marsh. Farmer Hockin have let 'n into an ou'd linney there.'

'And what if he have?'

'Well, he don't look on you with a very loving eye. He's an ignorant man; he's knocked you down once, and he says, says he, give him a chance, and he'll finish you some day. I'd keep off the moors if I was you, lawyer, for a bit. Mebbe Morideg 'll move further off. As long as he's near, and his heart of a blaze wi' wrongs, if I was you, Lawyer Physic, I'd just keep to the roads and lanes, and not show my head on the moor.'

'If he attempted to lay but a finger on me——'

'I don't reckon he'll lay a finger on you, sir; but he might hap accidental, when you was by, to lay a finger on the trigger of his old gun. He's a cruel good shot, folks say.'

Physic's face turned white.

'I'm really much obliged,' he said. 'I really am. You shall have the paddock and linney. I'll tell the squire they were promised to you before Downe applied.'

'No offence, sir. You don't happen to have an axe or a chopper here, do you?'

'I cannot say I have. Why?'

'Because, Lawyer Physic, if you had, I'd say, put it in the corner, and turn 'n with the blade upperways to cut the ill wish.'

'What ill wish?'

'The old woman, Mrs. Morideg. Her's got the evil eye, and her has ill-wished you afore a score o' people. It's sure to come on you unless you cut it off wi' a hatchet, as I said.'

'I'll risk that, Pike.' Then, as a tap came at his door, in a loud tone: 'Come in!'

'Mrs. Curgenven,' said the clerk. 'Are you engaged, sir?'

'For Mrs. Curgenven, at her service. By-bye, Pike, you shall have the—you know what; and I'll remember what you said.'

As Theresa came in: 'How do you do, my dear madam? What an honour! What a pleasure! Allow me to ring for another glass and some more sandwiches.'

Pike, the horsebreaker, put his hand to his forehead and backed out of the office, but took advantage of Mrs. Curgenven's attention being directed towards the agent to have a good stare at the new squiress.

'A chair—nay, five—all in the office are at your disposal,' said Physic. 'And sherry. What say you, madam? We must build up our constitutions; we mustn't let the clock run down.'

Theresa slightly bowed. She turned to see that Pike had left and had shut the door, and then, coming close to the office desk, and resting her gloved hand on it, she said, 'You are, no doubt, aware for what purpose I am here, Mr. Physic.'

'Stay a bit,' said the agent. He ran to the door and recalled Pike, and when the horsebreaker returned Physic said, 'By the way, I think Mr. Pike may be able to throw some light on a topic we mentioned the other day. Now, my good fellow, lend me your attention for a few minutes. Screw up your memory to concert pitch. Tell me if by great exertion you can recall what happened in October five years ago.'

'Yes, sir. I broke a nice little cob for Sir Sampson Tregontick.'

'I do not mean that. Can you remember whether you did anything for the late Captain Lambert?'

'No, sir, not five years ago; four years ago, come March, I bought him a mare which I thought 'ud 'a done for his carriage. You see, the second of his pair had a splint——'

'I do not mean that either, Pike. I am referring to your witnessing a document. Did Captain Curgenven ever call you into the house——'

'Into the bungalow, sir.'

'Yes, into the bungalow, to see him set his hand to any document?'

'Oh yes, I remember it quite well.'

'And what was the document, Pike?'

'Well, sir, I can't say as I was given it to look at. The squire he said he only wanted me and Roger Morideg to witness his signature to his will; that was all I knew about it.'

'Exactly. You can write your name, Pike, I suppose?'

'To be sure I can. I'm not a scholar. Never had the chances some young folk has now, but I can write "Samuel Pike"; I can do that.'

'And old Morideg?'

'Oh, he couldn't; he could only put a cross, and that a rare queer one I reckon, so the squire he put to it that it was his token, as how he couldn't write.'

'And you remember this perfectly, Pike?'

'Perfectly. It was just after St. Matthew's fair at Liskeard.'

'Thank you, that will do, Pike. I will not detain you longer.'

When the horsebreaker had left the office, Physic said with a smile: 'I thought it as well, as Pike happened to be here, to find out what he knew about the signature. When I show you the will in a minute or two you will see that it is as he said. He signed his name as witness, and old Morideg set his cross. Why Captain Lambert had these two men in to see him set his hand to the will is not hard to discover. The document was to be used only on an emergency, only in the event of your reappearing, and therefore in the event of his marriage with Miss Jane Pamphlet proving invalid and vitiating the marriage settlement. He therefore went out of his way to get a couple of ignorant and uninterested persons to act as witnesses. That, I take it, is the meaning of Pike and Morideg having been employed on the occasion. If you have any further doubt—if you think that I am trying to deceive you, go and ask old Roger Morideg. He has no love for me. I consigned him to prison for having knocked me down, and I have turned him out of his house. But he can't deny that he was called in by Captain Curgenven to witness his signature to his last will and testament. Now, madam.'

Physic went to his desk and unlocked a drawer. He drew forth a long envelope, and held it under the eyes of Theresa.

'You remember this, madam? It was what you put into my hands.'

'Yes. That is it,' said Theresa, recognizing at once the inscription on the cover.

'Very well,' said Physic. He drew the contents from the envelope, unfolded and spread the paper on the desk.

'Let me see,' mused the agent. 'How shall it be? I'm not going to put this into your hands. It's too valuable to me, and ditto to you. I'll hold it out flat on the desk, and you shall look over my shoulder and read it. Will that satisfy you?'

'You cannot trust me?'

Physic laughed. 'You've been too long in America. You know too much of the seamy side of life. You've been at the grindstone so that a fine edge is put on you. Thank you, madam, I'd rather not.'

He stood at the desk with his hands on the open will, and Theresa looked at it over his shoulder.

'There!' said the solicitor, pointing to the bottom of the sheet with a chuckle. 'Look! it is as Pike said: there is Morideg's scrambling cross, as crooked and shapeless as some of the granite crosses on the moor. And there stands "Samuel Pike." No mistake about it, none at all. How do you like it?'

'Let me read it,' said Theresa.

A little hope had risen in her heart that there might be in it some mention of herself—not for the sake of a bequest, but as a token of kindly feeling from her first husband. This will was to stand if she reappeared on the scene. She read it through, but her name did not once occur in it; not a penny was left to her by it; not a token appeared that Lambert entertained the smallest atom of regard for her.

She sighed.

'Ah! it makes you uncomfortable,' said Physic, with a chuckle. 'You don't relish having to turn out of Curgenven, do you?'

'It was not over that I sighed.'

'Oh! but that is not a cheering prospect. What will you do? "I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed," eh? Go on the stage again, and maintain Mr. Percival in cigars and cheap claret on what you earn? And have that pittance sliced into to send Justinian to school. You would prefer his absence to his presence.'

'I do not believe,' said Theresa, 'that Mrs. Jane will thank you for this will. She would prefer to remain as she is rather than have it produced.'

'I shall not ask her. I know that as well—better than you. She is too proud to endure the thought that she was not married respectably, and is not all square in the sight of society. But that is nothing to me. I prove the will, whether she likes it or not—whether you like it or not. I shall find some explanation for its not having been produced earlier'

'But if Mrs. Jane Curgenven does not wish it, why should you?'

'Put it as you will. I am an honourable man, and am bound to carry out the instructions of my deceased client. Or put it,' he laughed, 'that I owe you a grudge for having refused me and taken Percival Curgenven. It is the same to me which way you put it.'

'It is of no use, I suppose, my pleading with you?'

'None the least. Words are naught. But, I won't say that I am not amenable to reason, if very solid reason—*solid* reason, understand—be given me why I should put the will back in my desk.'

'Surely these are solid reasons, that neither party affected by the will desires its production. I, certainly not, for it sends me and my husband to poverty. But then I am quite sure Jane Curgenven does not desire that this will should be proved; the wound to her pride would be too great.'

'These may be solid reasons to you, but not to me.'

'Then what do you mean?'

'Come, now,' said Physic, 'I'm going to open a mine on a bit of moor I've acquired. It will cost money, and I shall have to sink a lot before there can be any return. Now, look here, madam, I will undertake one thing. Find me three hundred pounds, and for a twelvemonth you shall hear no more of this will. It shall remain in my desk, and not even walk out of its envelope.'

'Three hundred pounds!'

'Three hundred pounds. Unless that be forthcoming within one fortnight, I shall go to the Probate Office with the will.'

'I will speak to my husband.'

'You shall not mention it to him. I tell you he is too careless about consequences to be trusted. The will proved, he will curse his stars he was such a fool as not to propitiate me.'

'But how am I to find three hundred pounds?'

'That is your affair. A woman of the world such as you is full of expedients.'

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN ENCOUNTER.

It was Sunday: a fair and pleasant day. The Sunday-school scholars in file had been marched to church and ranged on their benches, exhaling around them a combined odour of soap and bergamot.

Farmers, in their glossy black coats and tall hats of antiquated fashion, took their places. The servants from the rectory and from the Manor arrived as flights of humming-birds, so brilliant was their plumage. The choir were collected about the organ that occupied the north chancel aisle, and at it sat, or 'presided,' as newspapers say, Jane Curgenven in widow's weeds. The organ had stood for several decades under the tower arch at the west end of the nave, where it was in perhaps the best position it could occupy. But there is a fashion in placing organs as there is a fashion in hats, and when the fashion was in full flow to have the organ at the east end of an aisle, where it would be most unsightly, at considerable cost it was removed to that position, and the rector preached on the occasion to assure the parishioners that the changed position of the instrument had no doctrinal signification.

At the urgency of the incumbent, to the irritation and amid the growls of the neighbourhood, on the death of the penultimate squire a memorial reredos had been set up to him in the chancel by public subscription, and now the neighbourhood was in agonies of apprehension lest an appeal should go forth for subscriptions to a memorial window to the late squire. The reredos in question was an elaborate structure of marble and tile, in which were floreated niches designed and executed to contain nothing, and exquisitely sculptured frameworks to enclose blanks. This reredos also, as the Rev. Mr. Pamphlet assured all doubters, had positively no meaning.

Indeed, so scrupulous a man was the Rev. Mr. Pamphlet lest erroneous teaching should be presented to eye or ear of his flock, that he took precautions to teach them nothing at all. He may be said through his pastorate to have dealt with sacrament and ceremony as boys do with eggs. Having blown out all their contents, he bade his parishioners thank Heaven that it was their glorious, their precious privilege to possess in their beloved church a museum of empty shells.

Mrs. Jane had her eye on the manorial pew that occupied the south chancel aisle. As long as she had been squiress she had not taken her place in it, as duty had called and glued her to the organ-stool, save on saints' days, when there was no choir. As Miss Pamphlet, daughter of the rector, she had drilled the choir, and had played the instrument that accompanied their voices. She did not resign her post, when she became lady of the manor, to school-master, mission woman, or Scripture reader, for the first could not manipulate an instrument; the mission woman, on principle, would play Gregorian music only; and the evangelist, also on principle, nothing but Moody and Sankey. Consequently the squiress had maintained her place as teacher of the singers and organist throughout her reign, and had never consciously desired to resign it for the more dignified and dominating position in the squirearchical pew under the monuments of many past Curgenvens and the helmet and tabard of Sir Justin Curgenven the Crusader, that hung below the wall-plate.

Now, however, that her right to occupy this pew was lost, she hankered after it, and was conscious of a consuming bitterness in her heart at the thought that perhaps the place therein that had been hers, had she cared to take it, for seventeen years, would now be invaded by a stranger—and such a stranger! That her place—*her* place, the place of Jane Curgenven of immaculate fame, who had never missed a choir practice, been the mainspring of all the parochial activities—should be taken from her by a mere adventuress! Jane Curgenven inadvertently trod on the pedals, and a note that escaped uttered a whine. The boy at the bellows, thinking this was a signal to him to display his energies, began immediately to labour at his lever, and this was followed by bursts of wind from the overladen bellows. Mrs. Jane looked round the angle of the instrument and shook her head at him, when he at once desisted.

Would the person who had married Percival appear in church that day? This was a question in Jane's mind, and she could not resolve whether it would be better for that person to remain away or to appear. If she did not come to church on this her first Sunday at Curgenven it would be much the same as a proclamation to the parish that she was not a Christian and Churchwoman, or, what was much the same thing, did not care to sit under the Rev. Mr. Pamphlet. It would be setting a bad example that was certain to be quoted by total and partial abstainers from divine worship, and it would accordingly be furnishing her, Jane Curgenven, with a grievance that she would be justified in making the very most of. It would be a plausible excuse for letting her imagination riot among the forms of heresy and agnosticism and atheism prevalent in the United States, and to speculate which had upset the faith of this individual—that is, supposing she ever had any to be upset. But then, on the other hand, if she did come to church, was it desirable, even for the sake of example? Would it not seriously compromise the Church and her father should some dreadful scandal come out relative to this woman's past, or should her moral or social conduct become scandalous in the future? And, again, what good was divine service likely to do to a person of this sort? It could only harden her, deaden her, perhaps puff her up with the thought that she was an admirable member of society and a devout daughter of the Church. Would it not be a sort of sacrilege for a creature of this character to raise her voice in the hymns and psalms, to say 'Amen' to the prayers, and to have the words of her father poured into her ears?

The bell ceased. At once Jane Curgenven rapped on the keys, and the blower bent his back at the bellows. To the strains of 'How beautiful are the feet' there sailed in the rector, in very full surplice and very full white whiskers, from the vestry and up the aisle, like a large white owl.

When the voluntary was concluded Mrs. Jane Curgenven turned in her seat to listen with one ear to the exhortation, and with one eye to observe the manorial pew. In it she saw the new Mrs. Curgenven standing, in plain navy-blue dress, with simple bonnet with feather and ribbons to match.

'I should have expected her to have been more of a peacock,' mused Jane. 'This kind of people are loud and dressy; but she is acting a part.'

It was remarkable how appropriate psalm and lesson were that day; how they spoke of certain persons being deceitful upon the weights, and lighter than vanity itself; of wandering stars to whom was reserved the blackness of darkness; all of which were of obvious application—so Jane Curgenven thought. Even the rector's sermon had points in it that seemed levelled against the intruder into the manorial pew, which was the more remarkable because the rector took pains to rub down every point that happened to appear in his discourses, lest it should have by hazard personal application to any one who might chance to be present. There are men, say the Germans, on the further side of the hills, and it was only at such as were beyond sight, and among whom his arrows might fall spent, that the Rev. Mr. Pamphlet ever drew his bow. After the service had been ambled through with decorum, and the Benediction had been spoken with pathos, Jane played a voluntary for the departure of the congregation. That ended, and the stops driven in, she turned on her stool and saw that Mrs. Percival Curgenven had not left the church with the rest, but had waited to retire after all had dispersed. Jane left her seat at the organ as Theresa stepped out of the pew, and both met in the chancel. Jane gave Theresa one of those looks from head to feet that express so much not of compliment but of insult. Then she sniffed, tossed her chin, and strode down the chancel steps, showing the other her back, and that a back that shrugged the shoulders simultaneously, then the right, and next the left; next, the hand, after the glove had been drawn on, was put behind, lifted the skirt and shook it. As Jane entered and passed through the churchyard, her attention was engrossed by the clouds, their shape, their menace of rain, till she had reached the gate opening into the rectory grounds, when she went through and swung it behind her sharply. To her surprise she heard the click of the hasp after it had been shut, and, turning round, saw that Theresa had entered the rectorial precincts.

The temerity of this proceeding roused Jane's anger. She could not legally forbid Theresa entering the church, but she could eject her from private grounds.

She stopped in her walk, and confronted the new squiress with sternness in her face.

'I beg your pardon: this is not a public walk.'

Theresa halted, and said gently, 'I do not wish to intrude.'

'This is private ground.'

'Then I will retire; but might I have a word?'

'You have probably mistaken the person to whom you wish to address yourself. I am Mrs. Curgenven.'

'It is with you I wish to speak.'

'You do me an honour' (spoken in that tone of voice and with an inflection that implied, 'In that you have the advantage of me').

Jane walked leisurely forward, with hand extended to take hold of the gate and close it, and with a repellent expression that forced Theresa to retreat.

Jane would not pause till she had made Percival's wife draw through the opening in the hedge and rail, and then, planting her feet on the granite threshold that served as a step into the churchyard, she said, 'I am at your service. But we lunch punctually at one on Sundays, and I expect to hear the bell shortly. Can you say your word in five minutes? I fear I cannot afford you a longer space for it. You are, if I mistake not——'

'One woman appealing to another woman,' said Theresa quickly. 'It is the will of Heaven that we should occupy the same parish, and we shall be, as near neighbours, constrained to see a good deal of each other. I am an entire stranger in this place. I have no friends but my husband. I have, to the best of my knowledge, no relations in the world. You are familiar with the neighbourhood, and are one with the society that is found in it. We both loved the same man—bore the same name—though our lots have been so different. You for many years have occupied that position in which I am now placed—one for which I was not born and to which I never aspired.'

Mrs. Jane raised her eyebrows and pursed up her lips. 'Never aspired!' she repeated.

'No; to which I never aspired,' said Theresa.

'And may I ask to what this preamble leads?'

'I have come as the woman I describe—a stranger, and friendless—to you, at home and amidst friends, to ask whether it is possible that you can receive and help me.'

Jane looked coldly at her. Was this acting, or was it a real appeal?

'I can quite understand,' she said, 'that with such a past as yours you should seek the help of some one to escape into respectable society.'

'I beg your pardon. My past is not one to be ashamed of,' said Theresa, with some indignation. 'If you mean my birth, that was my misfortune, not——'

'Oh, I did not allude to your birth; of course you could not help that. I cast no reflection on that.'

'Then what do you mean?'

'There are certain—well, you have been on the stage.'

'Yes, for part of a winter. I was driven to it. I needed bread. Would not you have done the same?'

'I—I would have died first. How dare you suggest such a thing to me?'

'What was the harm?'

'Oh, I do not say that the stage itself is harmful; it is the association. Every one knows——'

'Every one does not know,' said Theresa warmly. 'How can you, born in a parsonage, reared under the shadow of the church, living a country life, never associating with any save country people and parsonic families—how can you know anything about the stage?'

'I know this,' said Mrs. Jane: 'the exhalation from a swamp may reach one's nostrils without one having to plunge into it.'

'You have judged partially and unjustly. Excuse my saying so. But, as I said, I was on the stage but for one short period—half a season—and that only because, in the first place, I must have done something in order to live, and, in the next, I took the place of one who from sickness fell out of her engagement. In the difficulties in which the company was situated I was asked to supply her place, and the fact that she was not fulfilling her engagement preyed on her mind. To satisfy her, I went in her place. Before that, and after that, I never performed. And that person whose place I supplied was my dear present husband's first wife.'

'I thought as much!' exclaimed Jane, with a tone of triumph in her voice.

'What! that I took her place?'

'Oh dear no! but that she had been no better than——'

'She was a lovable, patient person, who was the bread-winner when, for the time, Mr. Percival Curgenven was without work. I knew her and I valued her.'

'"Birds of a feather,"' muttered Jane to herself.

'But that is neither here nor there. You did not know her and her merits. I did. Because I loved and valued her, Percival has taken me. Now to the point. Will you be kind to me? My position is difficult.'

'Kind I will be,' said Jane Curgenven haughtily, 'but you must excuse me if I say that we can never be more than acquaintances, without one atom of sympathy between us. We belong to different worlds of thought and feeling. I could not make a friend of you if I would. There may be—let us hope there are—good people who have taken up with the dramatic profession. But I do not understand them. They may be good; but it is a goodness I cannot comprehend. I live in a world of realities—and cannot understand one of pretences.'

'And you have been at Drumduskie?' asked Theresa, with involuntary irony in her tone.

Jane looked at her stonily. What had Drumduskie, the highly respectable cornfactor, and her own sublimely respectable sister, to do with the stage?—with acting?—with pretences? To Theresa it had seemed in that house as though she—the actress—had been the only person living a life of reality. Mrs. Jane proceeded:

'It is not merely that affair of the stage, which you try to explain away, that forms an insurmountable barrier. You know very well there was that other matter.'

'What other?'

'It is idle to pretend not to understand me. That scandalous, that infamous attempt on my poor dear lost husband!'

'Scandalous! infamous attempt! He was my husband.'

'That I never will admit.'

'But I can produce the most unimpeachable testimony, or rather, I could do so if I cared.'

'Can and could are different tenses.'

'If I have not done so it was out of consideration for you. If I do not do so it is because there is nothing to be gained by it.'

'Oh, pray do not consider me!'

'I acted on your father's request. There was not any advantage to myself to be reaped by establishing my marriage, and it would have brought distress on Mr. Pamphlet, and pain and humiliation on yourself.'

'You were mighty kind!'

'And even now I could satisfy you if you wished. I have Lambert's letters to me.'

Mrs. Jane flared up. 'For Heaven's sake! He is dead. What may have been your relations to one another in Malta or Corfu, or wherever it was you caught him, poor inexperienced fellow, in your deadly toils, I do not wish to ask. I *will* not inquire. There are certain poisonous combinations which it is deadly to look into. I do not know what Lambert may have written when young and foolish and without strong principles; what I do know is that after he became my husband he was a God-fearing and a moral and honourable man.'

'There is one thing more,' said Theresa, her heart beating with indignation. 'I have reason to suppose that he did sign a paper that practically admitted his marriage to me——'

'I know what you mean,' interrupted Jane. 'Physic spoke about it to me. That man is a scoundrel. He is capable of anything. I can quite believe that a will has been forged for the sake of whitewashing Lambert's temporary connection with yourself. Physic hinted something about this: it was to restore Curgenven to me and my daughter on the condition that we admitted that I—that she—I cannot even speak it. The thing was too infamous. Physic owes me a spite. He has done it out of malice, and perhaps in connivance with other interested parties.'

'Who could they be? Not I; for if such a will existed and were proved, Percival and I would be thrown into poverty again.'

'Oh, I don't stoop to inquire who contrived the matter. I do not care to unravel these mysteries.'

'And do you mean to say that you would refuse reinstatement in Curgenven Manor at such a price?'

'Most certainly. I will never connive at villainy. There goes the gong: I must to lunch.'

'Then friendship you cannot give me?'

'I cannot do the impossible. Between me and you there is a great gulf fixed, and we cannot shake hands across it.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

INVENI PORTUM.

Theresa remained in the churchyard; Jane Curgenven had closed the gate in her face, and had gone off to her lunch.

She seated herself wearily on a flat tombstone. The clerk had departed, and none of the congregation remained around the church. They had all gone to their midday meal. The yard was therefore as solitary as it was likely to be at midnight.

Theresa's brain was on fire, and a load of lead was on her heart. With her lay the decision of a momentous question—whether the will of the late Captain Lambert Curgenven was to be produced or not.

She understood the reason why Physic had objected to her consulting her husband. Percival was a man to decide offhand on any question by its superficial merits. On the surface, unquestionably, this case was simple enough. A will had been made, and therefore ought to be produced. To make away with such a document was felony, involving penal servitude. But what might be criminal by law need not be wrong in morals. There was much below the surface qualifying this question and making it difficult of solution, because complicating it with obligations to the wishes of living persons and with consideration for the memory of the dead.

If that will were to make its appearance, it would act as a bomb of dynamite thrown into Curgenven, carrying disaster and dismay on all sides.

Theresa had no great pity for Jane Curgenven, and no overwhelming regard for her father, but she knew that no blow could search out and cut to the quick their self-esteem, which was their prevailing if not their only passion, more cruelly than were she by means of this document to expose the real position Jane Pamphlet had held, and to deprive her of every title to be called by any other than her maiden name, and to bastardize her child. How terrible for the mother to have to inform her daughter that they could no longer bear the name that they had worn with such confidence! Not at any price, not certainly at that of reinstatement in Curgenven, would Jane submit to such shame. To be Miss Jane Pamphlet, squiress of Curgenven, would be to her worse than to have to fly to a desert island and there hide her dishonour.

Notwithstanding the rudeness, the unkindness Theresa had encountered, she shrank from causing Jane so much distress; she was unable to refuse a certain amount of admiration for the resolution with which this woman shut her ears and blinded her eyes to unpleasant facts, and by denying them thought that she deprived them of their right to be facts. But all Jane's resistance and pertinacity in refusing to see what was unpleasant could avail her nothing were the will established. It would be as the mistress, and not as the wife, of the late Captain Lambert that Jane could alone inherit Curgenven, at the same time that she resigned to the woman she looked upon as the dirt under her feet the honourable title of wife which she had so long borne.

Theresa, moreover, pitied the old rector, who had stalked so complacently on his stilts, a head taller morally than every one else; pitied him when she thought how the truth, if made public, would bear him down. The truth he had been obliged to admit, and for the sake of concealment had been ready to waive all claims of his daughter and grand-daughter on the Curgenven estate. But he might admit it to his own heart and remain on his stilts. If it became public he would come down, stilts and all.

Theresa thought also of her husband, of the ease and happiness that seemed to enhalo his later life. In the vigour of youth, in the strength of manhood he had made a botch of life; was it likely that he would be able to earn his living when he had turned the corner of his career? The desultory, erratic habit was inbred. He had not, under stress of necessity, been able to buckle to serious and steady work in the first half of life; was he likely to do so, to reveal energy and show perseverance, in the second stage?

She thought of Justinian. The boy had had his education neglected. His father had made him as himself, or had done his best to do so. A boy of generous disposition and warm heart; one who was cut out by nature to be a good country squire whose object in life is sport. But he was fit for nothing else. If forced to work for his living, there was every chance of his making as little way as had his father. But then Justinian was young, and not completely formed; there might be entertained hope for such, and Theresa did not spend much thought on him.

It was otherwise with the memory of the testator. Was she to reveal him to the world in an ugly light? Was it not her duty as his widow to be careful of his reputation, to save him from becoming the topic of conversation in every house between Liskeard and Launceston? What sort of comment would be passed on him? What could men and women say of the man who had so lightly deserted one wife, and without taking proper pains to ascertain whether she were alive or dead, had married another, and that the daughter of the most highly respected clergyman in the district? What could be said of the man who left the hateful secret to be disclosed after his death, because he was too great a coward to face the consequences of its being known whilst he was alive?

Theresa had little doubt in her mind that Lambert had committed suicide. No one else thought so save Physic. But were the truth to be known about his relations to her and Jane, every one would conclude that he had shot himself to escape exposure. He had shot himself. His punishment had fallen on him. Theresa could enter into his mind and weigh the agony of remorse, the doubt, the desperation that tore him, when he ran into the bungalow, took down the pistol, loaded it, and applied the muzzle to his head. He had suffered the penalty of his acts. Let that suffice. Let his memory remain unsullied by any act of hers. Let her stand between him and the revelation that would blast his name.

And, lastly, she thought of herself.

A qualm came over her. She had striven to obtain her livelihood, and had met with as little success as Percival, who had lounged. She had become over-wearied with the incessant strain, never pretermitted for a day, the strain to hold her own, to maintain her proper level, and not to sink exhausted on the ground, lay her head in the dust, and let the heart out of utter weariness cease to perform its function. At length, in ripe years, she had been able to seat herself and look forward to rest.

There was a picture that she knew well, and understood as perhaps did few others. It is in Doré's *Wandering Jew.* The unfortunate cobbler was doomed to walk till the Last Day. Century after century passes, and night and day the weary man trudges on. Others may sit down, but not he. Others may lay their heads on pillows and fall into dead sleep, but not he. The shoes wear out and re-form on his blistered feet. His muscles are knotted with cramp from over-strain, but may not be relaxed. His eyes are as lead in their sockets, but may not be closed. Then he hears the blast of the trumpet of the Archangel, and at once he sits down and proceeds to kick off his shoes. This is what the artist represents. He has seen into the heart of the utterly fagged-out man. His first, nay, his only thought, at the peal of the trumpet is to sit and be rid of his boots. And Theresa had been on the trudge for nineteen years, and was wearied to the death by it. She had found at length a seat and rest, but only for a moment; the harsh voice of Physic had bidden her tramp on. But not for ever; surely there remained but one struggle more, one on which she had never reckoned, and after that she would have nothing more to fear.

She must find three hundred pounds at once; and she had nothing of her own. In his wonted careless manner Percival had made no settlement on her at his marriage, he had neither promised her anything of her own whilst under coverture, nor assured her anything after his death. He had put his hand into his pocket, or had drawn a cheque when she had desired to buy anything; but that very morning in church Theresa had felt the awkwardness of having no purse and allowance of her own, for there had been a collection on behalf of some charity, and she had had no money to put into the plate.

She would have to obtain the three hundred pounds from Percival without being able to tell him for what she required the sum. She shrank from asking this; she was uncertain how he would take it; she feared lest it should occasion a difference, lest he should refuse her the money, or lest he should give it with reluctance and suspicion. It was a large sum to require without her being able to explain her need for it.

As she mused, her finger unconsciously traced the letters engraved in the slate of the tombstone on which she was seated. She now looked at the inscription. It ran:

Inveni portum; spes et Fortuna valete;
  Nil mihi vobiscum; ludite nunc alios.

She was a sufficient scholar to make out the sense. What! was the grave the only harbour of refuge for the storm-tossed? Were hope and fortune making their sport of her for a brief period, then to desert her?

She put her hand to her brow, that was throbbing as if it would burst. Then Percival, who had approached unobserved, unheard, over the turf of the churchyard, said: 'My dear, why have you not come to lunch? By Jove! it is new to me to say "lunch." I have been accustomed to dine at one o'clock, and have cold something and cheese in the evening for supper. Bathsheba's supreme effort was always for the midday meal.'

'I did not consider I should be wanted,' said Theresa.

'My dear, you are always in request when not present—not by me only. Justinian has been calling out for you. Are you not very well?'

'No, Percy, not that, but worried.'

'Gracious! what have you to worry you?'

'The usual worry. What troubled you in old days.'

'I was always short of money,' answered Percival readily. 'But that can't fret you now.'

'It does; I have nothing. There was a collection in the church this morning, and I had not a penny in my pocket.'

'Why did you not ask me before?'

'I did not know there would be a collection.'

'It doesn't matter. I'll send five bob to the old pomposity. What was it for?'

'I—I really do not recollect.'

'It does not matter. I'll send the five bob.'

'Yes, Percy, but that does not satisfy me. It is very awkward for me to be without cash.'

'What do you want, T.?'

Percival Curgenven put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a handful of copper and silver.

'I say, I have no gold here. But I can make up a sovereign in silver. And that will be all the better, T., because then you will have plenty of small change.'

'Thank you, Percival, but that does not exactly meet my requirements.' She rose from the tomb and laid her hand on his arm. 'I want more than that. It seems mean of me to ask it. I owe you everything, dear; you have been so good to me.'

'Oh, stuff! it is I who am laid under obligation.'

'Well, there are circumstances that oblige me to ask you to make me an allowance. May I ask you to give me a certain sum, to deal with just as I like, to spend or to hoard as suits my fancy; to go to when I want something very much, without having to come with the bill to you?'

'Certainly. But don't bother about that now.'

'Yes, Percy, I must. You see I may need money at any moment. To-morrow is Monday. Might I have my allowance to-morrow in a cheque?'

'Certainly you shall. Come along to feed. There is some very nice lobster salad, uncommonly well made. Our new cook is a first-rater.'

'Then I may have the cheque to-morrow?'

'Yes, T.; for how much? I dare say I could get you some gold by scraping about, if you want ready money.'

'I should like——' Then her heart failed her, and with her heart her powers. She sank back on the tombstone. The sum was so great. She was sick at heart.

'My dear husband,' she said in a timid voice, 'do you recall what I said when you proposed to me? I said then that it was possible, situated as I was, that certain persons might turn up and assert claims on me——'

'What, some relations have manifested themselves? Where are they? Ask them to lunch. Leave all that to me.'

'I cannot, Percy. I warned you then, but I did not then think it could happen, but what I feared has come about, though in a most unforeseen manner. I must have three hundred pounds to satisfy some one who otherwise could cause both of us great annoyance.'

'He has begun at once, upon my word he has! But don't let these fellows bother you. Pass them on to me. I'll satisfy them with my walking-stick.'

'No, no, Percy. This is a real claim. I cannot explain its nature to you. I cannot tell you any particulars about the person who makes the demand. All I can say is that, unless I find the money, I shall be put to great unhappiness that may be permanent.'

'You shall have the money; but it is a large sum.'

'And then you will not inquire what becomes of it.'

Percival was evidently uneasy.

'Is this the first and last demand?'

'It is the first; I hope, I do hope it will go no further.'

'I'll make it four hundred,' said her husband; 'at any rate for this year; then there is a hundred for yourself over. But, T., don't let this be tried again, or I shall have to interfere. There is no satisfying bloodsuckers. Is it some one who pretends cousinship?'

'I said I could tell you nothing.'

'All serene. I won't ask. But, I say, T., I hope the lobster salad will be as good when we get to it as it was when I started after you.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CIVILIZATION AND SAVAGERY.

After this scene in the churchyard, Theresa was aware of a slight diminution in cordiality in her husband. He was probably unconscious of it himself, but the freshness, the frankness of confidence between him and his wife were gone. He endeavoured to be cheery and amiable as usual, but there was evident to her eye an effort on his part to seem as he had been. A jar in the perfect harmony that had reigned between them had taken place, a drop of bitterness had fallen into the cup out of which both drank. A little germ of suspicion had entered into his heart, there to ferment. A tendency to decline was noticeable in the barometer that marked even weather. Theresa was alive to this, and unhappy. A fire burnt in her heart, a fire of resentment against Physic, who was the occasion. He had come to mar her happiness, which had otherwise been complete. She might have been content, had she felt confident that the three hundred pounds she had obtained for him were sure to suffice, and that he would no further press for money, but her fear was that this was but the beginning of a series of exactions, and that the result would be estrangement between her husband and herself. Percival would reasonably ask for whom and for what purpose these demands were made, and if she refused to tell him, and refuse she must, he would be filled with vague and disquieting suspicions that would destroy confidence between them, and seriously jeopardize the continuance of his affection.

And the man who was bringing this blight on her life was Physic. Her bosom heaved, her heart swelled. She clenched her hands. She hated him. She had been walking through the grounds, now she opened the wicket-gate and went out on the moor, and was suddenly aware of a girl who was dodging among the trees and behind the hedges.

Theresa halted in her walk and watched the girl, who, when she saw she was observed, came from her hiding and sauntered along the down, then stopped and turned to see whether Theresa were still looking at her. When she was aware that she continued to engage attention, she turned abruptly and came towards her.

Theresa was struck by the easy grace of the girl, by the elasticity of her tread, the flexibility of her upright body, and the beauty of her flowing red-gold hair. There was a sullen, peevish expression in her handsome face. She stepped up to Theresa and said: 'Why do you look at me? What do you want? Are you his new mother?'

Theresa smiled: 'I think I have heard of you. My husband, Mr. Curgenven, has mentioned your name. You are Esther Morideg.'

'Yes, I be. Is there any hurt in that?'

'None at all. I was very sorry to hear that you had been turned out of your cottage by Mr. Physic. Have you found a new home?'

'No. We are in a linney, a bit.'

'I will come and see you some day, and perhaps I may be able to take your grandmother something that will help to make her comfortable.'

'Oh, gran'fer and gran'mother don't want nothing but to be let alone. Us was well enough till Physic came and turned out we. I say, be you the squire's new wife?'

'Yes, I am Mrs. Curgenven.'

'I say, where is the young squire? Why ha'n't he been nigh us? I want to see'n, I do, cruel bad.'

'What for? Is there anything I can do for you?'

'You? No.'

'Then why do you want him?'

The girl looked irresolutely at her, then dropped her eyes. She caught her skirt and played with it, plucking with both hands and shuffling with her feet in the short grass.

'I do want to see'n, I do.'

'For what reason?'

The girl stamped impatiently. 'I ain't got no reasons. I ha'n't see'n for four days—there—wi'n't that do? I reckon he's been to the pass'nage, he has; he've been wi' Miss Alice, sure enough.' She raised her head, her cheeks were on fire.

'Well, I reckon and so he ort, but for all I want to see'n cruel bad, I do; so there now!'

'Esther,' said Theresa, 'would you like to come with me and see Curgenven house and gardens? I will show them to you.'

'Yes, I would. That other, the ou'd squiress, her turned me out; her wouldn't let me have tea wi' the childer, nor see nort. Her were a hard 'un.'

'Then come with me, Esther; I will show you everything.'

'Is he at home?'

'If you mean Mr. Justinian,' said Theresa, becoming more grave, 'he is not.'

The girl hesitated, but finally resolved to accept the offer. 'Come along then,' she said, with a swing of her body in the direction of the house.

The thoughts of Theresa were for awhile diverted from her own troubles. This wild moor-girl interested her. She also was a victim to Physic's unscrupulousness. As these two walked side by side, Theresa knew that she was herself menaced by that man with the like treatment that had been administered to Esther. One had been driven out of her home, the other was threatened with expulsion. The thought of this drew Theresa to her strange associate. But another consideration urged her to make Esther's acquaintance. Percival had told her how he had come upon Justinian with the girl at the cross on the moor-edge, and of his own uneasiness on that head.

Theresa and Esther were both waifs out of the evenly flowing stream of common social life. Neither had much to boast of in parentage. Both suffered from not belonging to the great bulk of settled humanity that knows all about itself and its belongings on all sides, that has grown on one spot, and has come to share the opinions and prejudices and likings of surrounding humanity, as insects and birds take the colours of the foliage in the midst of which they dwell. Esther in her own sphere was as much shunned and despised as Theresa knew she would be in the sphere into which she had been taken up. She felt a pity for the girl, and kindly interest in her, and Theresa looked at Esther's face with curiosity as she walked at her side.

It was a handsome face, with boldly cut features, a broad forehead, with fine hazel eyes under the arched brows; the mouth was singularly delicate and the chin fine for one in her class of life. The face was one of generous impulse; of strength and weakness in equal combination, of defiance and fear, of rudeness and refinement.

'I say,' the girl turned on Theresa, 'do'y like him now?'

'Whom? Mr. Justinian? Indeed I do. I like him very much.'

'There now,' said Esther, with light flashing in her face, 'I be main glad o' that. You don't seem such a bad 'un. I reckon he were a little out about his father for marrying you. But I told'n he couldn't ha' everything he liked. I reckon he likes you now he's come to know you?'

'Yes, I think so.'

'There, I be glad o' that.' She took Theresa's hand in hers and patted it with the other. 'He and Miss Alice be my best friends; and I reckon, if you behave yourself, you shall be another. I likes your face, I do.'

'Thank you, Esther,' said Theresa with a smile. 'Here we are at the house. Come in.'

'No; there now, I be 'most ashamed.' The girl hung back. 'It be so terrible fine.'

'There is no one to alarm you. You and I can go through the rooms together. We shall find no one there; Mr. Curgenven and Master Justinian have gone out shooting together.'

The girl looked at the house with mistrust. She wished to see the interior, and yet was shy of entering. She was conscious of the incongruity of her own appearance in rough homespun with the refinement and beauty of the interior.

When she entered the hall she kicked off her shoes, afraid to walk in them on the polished oak floor. She put her hands behind her back, and looked at the walls hung with family portraits, and at the flowers on a stand in the middle.

'Who be all they?' she asked, with her eyes on the pictures.

'Those are Curgenvens for two hundred years and more, fathers and grandfathers, back and back, when the dress was very different from what it is now.'

'I never knowed who my father was,' said Esther.

'Nor do I who was mine,' said Theresa.

'Now, you don't say so!' The girl drew to the side of Mrs. Curgenven.

Theresa led Esther into the dining-room, where the table was spread with white linen, and glittered with glass and silver. The girl looked steadily at the table for a while, then went to it and took up a dessert spoon. 'I reckon this be silver,' she said. 'Why, what a lot of shillings be in her!'

'Yes ; I dare say ten or twelve.'

'What do you have 'em about for? B'an't y' afeard folks 'll steal 'em?'

'Oh no, not here.'

'I would hide 'em up the chimley, under the drexil' (threshold). 'Don't y' now let ou'd Physic see 'em, or he'd never let y' be easy till he'd gotten them all. He's as great a thief, for certain sure, as any o' them chaps as be shut up in Bodmin gaol.'

'Would you like anything to eat, Esther? I can order you something directly.'

'No, thanky', I couldn't eat here, I'd not know how to do it wi' all these grand things about. I couldn't tell what I had i' my mouth when my eyes was so full of strange sights.'

'Then come with me and you shall see the drawing-room.'

'And what be that for? Sure you've more rooms than you can want. Why should you not sit and talk and do what you've a mind to do here after you've done eating? I can't see why you mun ha' a different chamber for everything you do—one to read in, one to talk in, one to eat in, and one to play in. I grant y' its reasonable to have one to sleep in as is not the same. But all the rest is waste and nonsense. Ay! and you must have a house for smoking 'baccy in too—the bungalow. 'Tis foolishness. I'm glad I'm not Jan Jeaks' (snail), to hev to carry such a house as this on my back. I don't know as it's much to make one happy to have a house. I've not got one; some Physic may come and turn you out. If you've none, why you're free as the air, and nobody can't take nothing from you, like the horniwinks' (plovers).

'How would you like to live in such a house as this?'

'I could not live in it; I should die. It's all very well to look at now and again, but to live in—bless you, I couldn't do it!'

Theresa took the girl into other parts of the house, and then said to her: 'Now, what more would you like?'

'Look'y here now!' said Esther, and drew open her throat, displaying her coral necklace. 'Have you aught like that?'

'I will show you my jewellery—yet not mine—the family jewels. When I am dead they will go to the wife of Justinian.'

She led the girl up the stately Queen Anne staircase, with full-length portraits on it of Curgenvens in powder and wigs, in blue velvet and crimson velvet, of the ladies of the house with their hair low over their eyes, in shot satins, with pearls about their long necks, and dogs at their sides.

'These,' said Theresa, turning on a landing, 'these are the wives of the Curgenvens, grand and beautiful ladies who never let the sun look on their faces unveiled.'

She conducted Esther to her bedroom, opened a cabinet and produced a jewel-case, unlocked it, and let the evening sun glitter on the diamonds.

The girl took up a necklet, and in speechless admiration let it twinkle about her fingers. Then she was shown another of sapphires; rings and bracelets, and brooches and tiaras. Theresa removed her ha tand put on some of the jewellery, that the girl might understand how it was worn.

Then suddenly Esther put her hand to her own coral necklace and tore the string so that the coral grains fell about the floor. 'It's just naught at all,' she said.

Theresa knelt and began to collect the strewn members of the necklace. 'You are wrong—altogether wrong,' said she. 'Esther, this coral looks charming on your pretty neck; it suits you admirably. But these diamonds and pearls would make you ridiculous. You could not wear them.'

'No; I'd be a dressed-up monkey,' said the girl.

'These will go to Justinian's wife, and will suit beautifully her delicate skin and her refined beauty.' As Theresa spoke, she felt over the floor for more pieces of coral. 'She will be a lady like those you saw on the stairs. Some of these jewels were worn by them, and suited them, as you could see in the paintings. Justinian's wife will be painted some day in the same style, and hung with the others. I dare say she will be quite as noble and lovely a lady as any of them. She will be very happy in this grand house, and will know exactly what to do in it—in each of the rooms; know all as a matter of course, because she was bred to it. And she will play the piano and make sweet music——'

'Why are you saying all this?' asked Esther uneasily.

'Esther, my dear,' continued Theresa, without noticing her interruption, 'it would be dreadful to Justinian to lose all this, to be poor, to have to live in a linney, to eat without silver forks, and lie in fern and heather, and not have servants to wait on him. It would be as strange to him, such a life as yours, as it would be strange to you to live such a life as his.'

'I reckon it would.'

The girl was turning a pearl necklace about her brown bare arm.

'See!' she said; 'don't this look comical?'

'It does. But are you attending to what I say?'

Esther laid the string of pearls aside in the case. 'There,' she said, 'lock it all up again. I've seen enough of them. I don't want to see them no more.'

'I will do so, and put them aside for Justinian's wife, as I am not likely to wear them. I was not born to such a place as this, and so I cannot wear them. Now, Esther, tell me the truth. Why were you hiding among the trees when I came through the park? For whom were you looking? On whom waiting?'

The girl hung her head and turned it aside.

'You need not answer me,' said Theresa; 'I know. You were hoping to meet Justinian.'

'If I were, there's no harm in that;' with a toss of the hair and a slight tone of defiance.

'It will not do, dear Esther; indeed it will not. You never can properly be Justinian's companion. How can you, when he lives in such a house as this, and you, as you say, in an old stable?'

The girl put up her arms and dropped her face between them.

'It is this that I wished to say to you,' pursued Theresa, 'that you two can be friends only at a distance. You see now that it is not possible for you to be his wife. You never could shape yourself to live in this place. On the other hand, you could not drag him away to your wretched hovel. He would be infinitely miserable there. And, Esther, you can be a friend to the young squire only at a long distance. Do you understand? I speak seriously. There is one thing to a woman above everything precious, her honour. Treasure that, dear child. Never risk that. Lose that, and though the noblest in the land you are vile as dirt. Preserve it, and you hold up your head as high as a princess. I am anxious for you, I am anxious for him. He is generous; he is careless. You are generous and inconsiderate——'

The girl threw herself passionately on the floor as she would have done on her native heath, and still burying her face in her arms, and turning it to the carpet, sobbed: 'I love him, I do; I does!'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TRYING THE PISTOL.

Theresa had been speaking, whilst engaged in collecting the coral beads, kneeling on the carpet. When she saw the girl fling herself down, she went to her, on her knees, and seated herself beside her. The corals she had collected were in one palm. She laid the other hand on the ruddy golden head that was rocking and tossing, and gently stroked it.

'Esther, my dear, you must be reasonable. You love the sun, but if you climbed into heaven to it, you would be burnt in its fire. You love the moon, but if you were to drag it down to your little hut, its rays would be quenched, it would turn black as a cinder in your hands. You know that you never, never, never can be Justinian's wife.'

The girl, speaking into the pile of the carpet through her fingers, said, 'I know that. Didn't I join their hands in the Tolmaen?'

'I do not understand you, Esther.'

'Didn't I take him and make him hold Miss Alice's hand through the holed stone? and that's a surer marriage than any parson can bind. I did it—I—and what I did I cannot undo.'

'I do not understand about that,' said Theresa, raising her hand for a moment from the girl's head, that had ceased its rocking motion under the gentle pressure. 'I know nothing about this holed stone, my dear, but of this I am very sure, that you and Justinian are too wide apart ever with honour, and without shame and misery, to be nearer each other than you are now. So try to be a sensible girl, and conquer this feeling in your heart that can only make you wretched, and which, if not driven away, may be the occasion of such disgrace to Justinian as will destroy his prospects in life.'

'She at the "Cornish Chough" said that.' Esther raised her head and turned it.

'And she, whoever she was, said what is true. Will you listen patiently to me, child?'

'Yes, I'll try.'

Esther lifted herself on one arm, and turned to Theresa.

'Why did you take your hand off me? Are you angry?'

'No, indeed I am not.'

The evening light, shining through the window that commanded the western sky, fell over the girl. The whole sky was in flame above the set sun, and in the flame were bars of cloud as pure gold gleaming with intense brilliancy. The amber glare from the sky pouring in at the window suffused the girl on the floor. In her tossing, her hair had become untied; it fell in a shining flood over her shoulder, and the arm that stayed her up.

Theresa put out her hand and drew the young head to her, and laid it on her lap.

'There, my dear, will that please you? How hot your head is!'

'Go on,' said Esther, 'say what you will.'

'I have not much to say,' continued Theresa, 'but what I say I am sure, if you have—and I know you have it—an honest and true heart—I am sure you say to yourself in your own heart. You love Justinian, and he likes you after a fashion. So do I, I like you, I like you very much. So does Alice, so must all who come to know you.'

'You are wrong—folks hate me.'

'Surely not hate you.'

'They don't like me. No mothers 'll let their children come with me. No maids 'll ever play wi' me. I've no friends.'

'They do not understand you. You are a little wild for them. But that is not what I am speaking about. What I was about to say was this, did you ever hear the story of the man who married a cat?'

'A cat! No.'

'He had a beautiful tabby, and she was a capital mouser. She was such a beautiful puss, with such white soft fur on her paws, and purred so sweetly, that the man asked Juno to turn her into a woman.'

'Who's Juno?'

'Well, we will say a wise woman.'

'Go on. Did she do it?'

'Yes.'

'I know,' said Esther musingly, 'that wise women theirselves turn o' night-times when they likes into hares. There was one out Altarnun way. Her went about all over the country to night-times, after dimmets' (twilight). 'But one night her got caught i' Squire Rodd's trap—set by the keeper. And next morning what did he find in his trap but a woman's hand! And he went round axing what she-folks was ill.

And when he came to Genefer Carndue's cottage, her ou'd man—silly fool—let out as her were i' bed wi' a bad arm. Then the keeper he forced his way up-stair, and found the ou'd woman i' bed, and he pu'd down the clothes, and sure enough, her had lost a hand.'

'You are interrupting my story.'

'Sure and sartain I was. There, go on, and put your hand over my lips to make me hou'd my tongue.'

'Well, Esther, so this wise woman, Juno, she did what she was asked. She turned the cat into a beautiful young wife. The man was very pleased, and he had the table spread for a great wedding feast, and he invited all his friends to it, to see what a lovely wife he had. Well, they came and made merry, and praised her very highly. All went on very well till a mouse ran through the room. Then up sprang the lady, and the table-cloth caught in her dress, and she jumped away and ran after the mouse, pulling the table-cloth and all the glasses and plates, and dishes and bottles, and pies and cakes, off the table in a smash and confusion on the floor. But she did not care; she had caught and was eating the mouse.'

'Oh, jimmery-chry!' Esther burst out laughing; then slowly rose to her knees and stood up.

'Yes,' she said, 'I reckon it's a right sort o' a tale for me, and I knows it is so. There, gi'e me my corals, I'll string them again, and I promise you I'll put the thoughts of him out o' my heart as much as I can. I've been silly, I know. I wouldn't go after a mouse—no! But if I were at a great feast, with grand silver and goold plates, and knives and forks, and glass and gran' folks, ladies and gentles, like as there in them picturs on the stairs, and talkin' about I don't know what, and if I was to hear a horniwink' (plover) 'whistle outside o' the winder, I'd up—I know—just like that lady, and away I'd go out o' the winder and away after the horniwink, and to the moors and over Trewortha—and never come back there no more.'

'That is a brave and good girl. I thought you would do what is right, and I am not deceived.'

Esther turned sharply and looked with brightened face into Theresa's eyes and smiled, two deep dimples forming at the corners of her mouth. Then she caught up Theresa's hand and kissed it passionately.

'Now,' said she, 'show me the bungalow, as they ca' it, wi' all them queer things inside as I've heard tell on, that the captain made.'

'I will cheerfully show you what is there. But some of the contrivances no longer work, or I do not understand how to wind them up, and some have been removed.'

The girl fastened up her hair, and followed her guide down the great staircase. On the landing they passed a maid-servant, who looked with surprise and disgust at the half-savage girl, the grand-daughter of the white-witch, and she stood well back against the wall, not so much out of deference to her mistress as to avoid the touch of the coarse clothes of Esther as she brushed by. In the hall was the footman, and he also stood aside and stared at the girl with insolence and disdain. What right had she, from off the moors, to be in the house? What could Mrs. Curgenven mean by letting her in, by taking her up-stairs? There were queer tales about the mistress—that she'd been a sort of a governess, or goodness knew what. John Thomas could believe anything of her, now that she so far forgot herself as to associate with, and bring up the great staircase, such a creature as Esther Morideg. Birds of a feather fly together. You may know a person by the company he or she keeps. Lor! what be the world a-coming to? John Thomas was expected to go up and down the back-stairs, and if the back-stairs was good enough for him, it was a great deal too good for wild creatures off the moor.

Esther was quite conscious of the impression she wrought on the two servants, and she breathed freer when she was outside the house. Theresa turned back to speak to the footman, and require refreshments to be brought into the bungalow, where she considered Esther would be more disposed to eat than in the house.

In the bungalow, Theresa amused the girl with what pieces of mechanism could be got to act, and then brought her into the smoking-room, whither she had ordered a tray with rabbit-pie, tart, and some cider to be brought.

Here she seated herself, and allowed Esther to look at the weapons on the wall, the whips, spurs, fishing-rods, and spoils of the chase.

'Can you shoot?' asked the girl, turning to Theresa, who shook her head with a smile in response.

'But I can,' said Esther. 'My gran'fer he's brave wi' his gun, and I reckon I can bring down a woodcock as well as he. But thickey little things—they be pisterns' (pistols), 'I s'pose. I never shot wi' such as they.'

She took down a pistol, cocked it, and let down the hammer cautiously. She then took the ramrod—it was an old-fashioned pistol, not a breechloader—and tried whether the instrument was loaded. Satisfied that it was not, she turned again to Theresa, and in a coaxing tone said, 'Now do'y then let me have a shot wi' she and try what her be like.'

'So long as you do no mischief, I do not object.'

'Where be the bullets?' asked the girl. She had found the gunpowder case and run a charge into the barrel.

Theresa opened a drawer, where were bullets, and wads, and caps; also in compartments the cartridges of various sizes for breechloaders.

The girl at once fitted a bullet and put on a cap. Then she threw open the window.

'Now, what shall I have a shot at?' she asked, looking out into the park. 'Hish! For sartain there be a hoodwall' (woodpecker) 'running up thickey oak tree. Do'y see 'n? Yonder. I wonder if I can hit 'n.'

The girl raised the pistol and fired.

The bird flew away.

'I missed 'n,' said Esther. 'There, now, if it had been gran'fer's ou'd gun I'd not ha' done that. Or, by golly! if it had been Lawyer Physic standin' there, I dare take my oath I'd ha' shot 'n.'

In the door, aghast, stood the footman with the tray.

Theresa made a sign to him to place the tray on the table by the window.

'Now, Esther, here is something better for you to do than to shoot hoodwalls.'

'I did'n shoot 'n,' said the girl; 'for one, I pitied the poor bird; for the other, I did'n understand a little pistern.'

She was loading again.

'There,' said she, 'now you try. Have a shot and see if you can do better nor me.'

'No, thank you, Esther. I am quite sure I would fail more completely than yourself. Come now, sit and eat and drink.'

'When you're by yourself,' said the girl, 'try; in a time or two it will come. It would wi' me if I had thickey pistern to practise wi'. There, I'll put 'n back i' her place. Mind now, her's loaden. You can amuse yourself wi' she when you like, and mebbe make a better shot nor I. Or,' she took down the pistol again, 'might I have a shot at the footman there?'

The man fled out of the smoking-room, ran back to the house and to the servants' hall, as fast as his stockinged legs could carry him.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A NEW PROPOSAL.

No ladies called on the new Mrs. Curgenven. Gentlemen came to show courtesy to the squire, and clumsily apologized for their wives. One had a bad cold; another was visiting friends in town; the horses of several were indisposed; bereavement held others at home.

The rumour had circulated, whence and by whom started none could say, that the new Mrs. Curgenven was of doubtful character. It was asserted that she had been a ballet-dancer. How the ladies who made this assertion came to hold that opinion and formulate it is not easily explained, as none of them knew anything whatever about Theresa's past life. Moreover, such of their husbands as had seen her, had protested that she was a perfect lady, of very charming manners and engaging appearance. Perhaps it was this fact that went against her. All the married ladies held as tenaciously as they did to the Athanasian Creed, that their husbands were easily deluded by pleasant features and a little flattery. Not one would allow that her husband had discernment and good taste except in that spasmodic moment when he made the choice of herself. The more the gentlemen expatiated on the amiable manners, the handsome face, the graceful courtesy of Mrs. Curgenven, the more enrooted became the conviction in the bosoms of their ladies that she was a designing and unprincipled woman. That she was in bad form they concluded because she had succeeded and displaced Mrs. Curgenven the dowager. Jane was everything that society could desire: she was a woman of irreproachable morals, of the most formed manners in the most approved mould. She was a woman of sound sense and clear understanding. She was a woman of whom everything was known, from her birth till her bereavement. In every stage of life she had behaved well. She had been excellent as a hostess, admirable as a manageress of bazaars and charities; she had never said a word that was lacking in good feeling, never done an act that was tactless. In her house, as wife, mother, mistress, she was unapproachable. The praises of Mrs. Jane Curgenven were sung on all sides over every breakfast and dinner-table; she was danced before the eyes of sleepy husbands in curtain lectures, she was held up in the school-room to young girls entering on life to be admired and striven after as a pattern, and everywhere and always the laudation of Mrs. Lambert carried with it the sometimes tacit, more often outspoken condemnation of Mrs. Percival. The very fact that there were two Mrs. Curgenvens of Curgenven forced them into comparison with one another; and when one Mrs. Curgenven had the advantage of being a parson's daughter, of having been known for many years to all the aristocracy of the neighbourhood, and hugged to its bosom, whereas the other Mrs. Curgenven had dropped suddenly from the sky, or come up from the other place, and nothing was known either of her origin or of her acquaintances; then, naturally enough, all the favour rolled into the scale of Jane, and none was available to weight that of Theresa.

The latter was fully aware how matters stood. She had waited in curiosity and hope for a week or two expecting visitors, but as no ladies came, the consciousness was forced upon her that society had pronounced against her.

Percival was impatient and angry. He could not bear in silence the slight cast on his wife. He stormed and grumbled; he fretted and found fault. He rushed off to the rectory to demand an explanation from Jane, but Jane declined to give him any. He denounced her as having set the neighbours against his wife. She repudiated the charge with indignation and with justice. She had not said a word against Theresa. When neighbours had asked questions relative to the new squiress, or turned the conversation to her in Jane's presence, she had maintained the strictest silence; she had refused to be drawn to express an opinion concerning Percival's wife.

What was to be done?

Percival vowed he would leave Curgenven next winter and go to Italy, the Riviera, anywhere to be out of the ostracism that had fallen on his wife, and through her on him. He could not go to dinner-parties to which she was not invited. He could not invite neighbours to his table, knowing that his invitations would be accepted by gentlemen only.

Yet it must be allowed that those gentlemen who did come to Curgenven tried their best, by deference and kindly civility to Mrs. Curgenven, to make up to her for the abstention of their wives; but they could not ask her to their houses, and all their efforts to persuade their womenkind to call on Mrs. Curgenven only deepened and intensified their mistrust of her.

The servants noticed that there were no lady callers, and commented on it. They began to entertain doubts as to the respectability of their mistress, to form romances concerning her early life, when she had been a stage-player, as they said. The villagers talked, they eyed the new squiress with suspicion, but waited to see whether she was liberally disposed before deciding finally as to her claim to be a lady.

Theresa offered the rector to take a class in the Sunday school. He passed his fingers through his white whiskers, and with many polite and unctuous speeches declined her services. There really was not a class that was not provided with a teacher. It would positively be the imposition of too heavy a task upon her.

Theresa was not one who cared for society. She lived much wrapped up in herself, and was happy to have books to read, beautiful objects about her, and a husband whose whims and pleasures she might consult. But the isolation in which she was placed wounded her; it grieved her specially because it annoyed Percival, and debarred him from taking his proper position in county society.

Theresa was in the bungalow smoking-room thinking of these things when Physic entered.

'Glad to find you here, madam—and alone,' said he.

'Mr. Curgenven is out. I presume it is he whom you wish to see.'

'I am come on business.'

'As I said, he is not at home.'

'Precisely, but my business is with yourself.'

'Indeed!'

'You were so good as to furnish me with promptitude the sum I had demanded. For that I am obliged. Circumstances have occurred, over which I have no control, that place me in extreme pecuniary difficulties, and oblige me immediately to find a sum of money that I am unable unassisted to raise.'

'I quite understand to what this leads,' said Theresa haughtily. 'Because you have been able to wring from me three hundred pounds, you are resolved to wring some more.'

'It is a case of necessity.'

'It is a case of the horse-leech,' retorted Theresa. 'You will not let go till you have taken all you can.'

'When a man is driven to his wits' ends for money——'

'He loses all scruple, that is, supposing he had any scruples to lose.'

'You put things in a very harsh light.'

'The case stands thus,' said Theresa, her angry blood swelling her veins. 'You have determined to get from me all you can at the risk of causing misery to me by estranging my husband from me. Do your worst. You shall have no more.'

'I do not understand you.'

'I spoke plainly enough. I will not be tortured thus. It was to me inexpressibly painful to extort from Mr. Curgenven the sum you required. I did it, but I will not do it again.'

'Very well,' said Physic. 'Then you know the consequences. I shall produce the will.'

'As you like. But I do not believe you will do it. What have you to gain? Now, you are agent for this estate, not without some advantage to yourself. Do you suppose you will retain the agency when it passes to Mrs. Jane Curgenven? If what I hear be true, she was constantly urging Captain Curgenven to take it from you and give it to the Smiths, who are said to be worthy and upright men. When the estate is hers, will she retain you as her factotum? I doubt it. So do you. If you prove that will, you lose what is worth something not inconsiderable. For that reason you will not do it.'

Physic looked at Theresa with a blank expression, but speedily recovered himself.

'What is this agency worth that I should care for it? If I tell Mrs. Jane that I can give her the estate and house, I can make it a proviso that I am kept in my place, and that I receive some consideration for my services in helping her into her own.'

'No, you will not. She will not thank you to be proclaimed no wife of Captain Curgenven, and her child to be illegitimate. She will owe you a grudge and not a debt.'

'We shall see.'

'Yes, we shall see. If this is all you have to say to me you may go.'

'And you will drive me to use the will?'

'You will not use it. You are too well aware of your own interest to do so. I tell you that I had rather be in poverty again than endure the torture to which you subject me, and the risk of forfeiting my husband's love.'

'Come, come, do not be so hot!' said Physic, assuming a conciliatory tone. 'You know that we are old friends.'

'Indeed! I know nothing of the kind.'

'Some consideration is due to me as an old admirer.'

Theresa pointed to the door. 'Leave me. Do your worst.'

'I will not go. I will not leave you in anger against me

Upon my soul I do not desire to cause you annoyance. I would give you back the will most readily if I could afford it. I do not wish to drive you out of Curgenven. I do not wish to see Mrs. Jane come in, with her nose in the air. I ask but a reasonable thing. Here you are in possession of a fine estate worth four thousand a year, and, as you know very well, you hold it only because I do not produce a certain document. That document you put into my hand and you read what was written on it. I was empowered to use it or suppress it, as I saw fit.'

'I do not suppose that this has any legal authority, and that you are really justified in retaining it.'

'I am the best judge of that. Suffice it, between you and me, that you are mistress of Curgenven because I use the right given me by the writer of that paper. It stands to common sense that I should be considered for what I have done. I have done you a vast favour—worth four thousand a year—and now that I am in dire need for money I may with fairness ask you to let me have a little help.'

'A little help! You have had three hundred pounds.'

'What is three hundred to four thousand a year for, say, ten years? Four thousand for ten years is forty thousand pounds, and you offer me three hundred! I spit at the offer. You would give me a dog's pay for my services. I will be treated like a man.'

'Then do your worst, Mr. Physic. We shall know what to expect.'

'Beggary, utter beggary.'

'Not beggary—poverty, perhaps.'

'Poverty most assuredly. And then — how will Mr. Percival find himself in poverty? You know that there is no work in him, no stability. He never earned an honest penny in his life. He can sponge—that is all he can do.'

'If we come to poverty we shall have to shape ourselves to our new quarters. That will be our concern. Tell me, once for all, what your demand is, so that this will may be delivered into my hands—into my hands, which in an inconsiderate moment, in this room, confided it to you.'

'A thousand pounds.'

'That is to say, seven hundred in addition to the three hundred you have received.'

'Oh dear no! It is dirt cheap at thirteen hundred.'

'A thousand stars out of the sky you might as well demand. I neither will ask my husband for the sum, nor, did I ask it, would he give it, not knowing the purpose for which it was given.'

'Let us understand each other,' said Physic coolly. 'You do not want to be further annoyed by me. Very good. A thousand pounds will place you in such a position that my power to annoy you is gone. I do not desire to turn you and your husband out of Curgenven, but I am not disposed to surrender my hold over you for any sum less than a thousand pounds. I should be a fool if I did.'

'I tell you for once and all, a thousand pounds is impossible. Do you suppose that my husband would sign me a cheque for that sum without knowing what I would do with it? I had trouble enough getting him to give me a cheque for three hundred.'

'I am well aware of that. But I know also that he has a Bolivian bond for a thousand. Three hundred and that would serve my purpose; it is about the only security he has.'

'What! you would have me rob him?'

'No robbery at all. It is securing Curgenven and four thousand per annum to him. A very small sacrifice indeed. If you deny me what I want, then indeed you rob him of a fine property, a good income, and an enviable position. If he loses all this, you do it, you despoil him of everything rather than relieve my immediate necessity by handing over to me this trumpery bond.'

'He keeps all his papers locked.'

'But you know where is the key.'

'I will not do it. Nothing in the world will induce me to it. I cannot—will not—rob my dear husband.'

'Then I offer you another alternative.'

'What is that?' Theresa buried her face in her hands.

'There are family jewels, heirlooms, of very considerable value; in fact, worth more than a thousand pounds. These, I presume, are in your keeping. Let me have them. I do not propose to get rid of them, but to raise on them the sum I require; and I leave it to you to get them back by the gradual extinction of the sum raised upon them.'

'Now you propose that I should rob the family.'

'What family? The dead Curgenvens in the ancestral vault, in the family silo? or the Curgenvens that are yet to come? Who will know if these jewels are in other hands for a while? Do you see so much company? go out to so many grand balls, where you would be expected to wear the jewels? Trust me, they may sleep in their cases so long as you are Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven. The county folk don't like you, they will have nothing to say to the adventuress—the soubrette of the San Francisco theatre. No—the drive may be grass-grown for all it is needed for the carriages of the squirearchy of the neighbourhood. You may dismiss the gatekeepers at the lodge, they will not be called on to open to any. The neighbourhood has placed you under an interdict, and as you are under an interdict you will not be required to wear jewellery. If the jewels be away from Curgenven, no one will be the wiser save yourself and me. What does Mr. Curgenven care about these gewgaws? In ten years, by a payment of a hundred and fifty per annum, I dare say you may be able to get them all back into your hands again. Meantime Curgenven is assured to your husband and to you. I leave you a week to turn this proposal over in your mind. Let me see—this day week—where shall we meet? not anywhere near the house. Say at Tolmenna—on the moor, where we can make sure none will be looking and listening. If you bring the jewels, I will bring the will, and we shall effect an exchange. Till this day week—and then—at Tolmenna.'

CHAPTER XL.

OLD AND NEW QUARTERS.

'Get on your hat, Alice. I am going to carry you off.'

'Where to, Justinian?'

'It is too bad; you have not been to the house for an age. I run in here like a tame cat, and you never come to us. By the way, Aunt Jane, you have not been there either.'

'No, Justinian. You must remember my feelings. It would be most painful for me to go there, where I have spent such happy years.'

'But, Aunt Jane, you do not know my step-mother.'

'Oh—I do,' in a chilling tone.

'Alice does not. It is too bad that here she should be so close to the house, and not have been in to make her acquaintance. The step-mother is not a bad sort of person at all—she's rather jolly, in fact, and I don't blame the governor. So now, Alice, come and be introduced, and make your courtesy.'

'Oh — I — I think Alice has a music-lesson,' said Mrs. Jane.

'No, mamma. Wednesday is my day.'

'But practice, dear. You cannot expect to get on, and it is not fair to your master, who comes out from Liskeard, nor to me, who have to pay half-a-guinea for your lesson, if you do not work for it in preparation.'

'But, mamma, I can prepare at another time.'

Mrs. Curgenven frowned, and slightly shook her head, as a private notice to her daughter not to combat her reasons.

'Besides,' said that lady, 'there are some gathers out in her dress.'

'Oh, that is nothing, aunt. Alice can change her frock.'

'It is not that only; there are various reasons.'

'But what are they?' persisted Justinian. 'It seems to me that Alice is in duty bound to pay her respects to my step-mother. It seems so queer that she should not come to our house and get acquainted with her. I am quite sure Alice will like her, she is such a lady—so true a lady.'

'You are an excellent judge, no doubt,' said Mrs. Curgenven, throwing up her head.

'I think I am,' retorted Justinian frankly 'You say you know her. Don't you think so yourself?'

'Really, my dear fellow, that is not a fair question. Naturally I cannot say other than that your father has made his choice, and no doubt on excellent reasons.'

'That is not an answer at all. I tell you freely that I did not readily swallow the tidings that I had a step-mother. I was very angry; but when I saw her, and had a talk with her, I found that I had been mistaken; and it is the place of a gentleman to acknowledge when he has been in error, and only a fool persists in his prejudice after he has been shown that he was mistaken. So—there—I have had no proper reasons. Alice, get on your hat.'

'No,' said Mrs. Curgenven, 'Alice was not well this morning. I detected a slight cobweb in her throat, and the weather is damp. I do not wish her to go out. Indeed, I am going to administer bryonia.'

'Mamma, I am quite well!' said the astonished girl.

'My dear, you try to persuade yourself that you are. Stay here—or, no—come up with me to my room. You must have a sip of bryonia every two hours out of my china spoon. Justinian, when bryonia is administered there must be no exposure to damp. Follow me, Alice, at once. Justinian, remain where you are till my return.'

As soon as the mother and daughter were in the hall, Alice remonstrated against being made to take medicine.

'Mamma, I really am perfectly well.'

'My dear, I ought to judge that better than you. You take bryonia to prevent your going to the Manor House. Now go to my room and wait there for me. You can get out the china spoon if you like, it is in the medicine-chest.'

Then Mrs. Curgenven entered the study, shut the door behind her, and said to her father, who was then engaged on the *Contemporary* and a sermon in little dips and alternations:

'Papa, here is a pretty kettle of fish. Justinian wishes to carry off Alice to bow down to and worship that woman, and he has taken me to task for not visiting her. What is to be done?'

'Jane, of course we must be ordinarily civil.'

'I cannot dissemble. If she were in a penitentiary I would cheerfully visit her daily, and I would go without Devonshire cream for a twelvemonth, even in the black currant tart, if by my self-denial I could save her soul; but I cannot, and will not, countenance her at Curgenven.'

'But, Jane, you must remember that she is the wife of our squire, who is your poor husband's cousin. There will be a great deal of talk, and very unpleasant talk, if you hold yourself aloof. What can people say to explain your conduct but what is most distressing to think could be said of a member of the Curgenven family?'

'I don't care three straws what people say. I will not regard her as a relation.'

'Then why did you ask my opinion? You have made up your mind.'

'I ask, because here is Justinian at me for not going to the Manor House, and refusing to take any excuse for Alice. I am obliged to dose her with bryonia.'

'Why, what is the matter with her?'

'Nothing; but I must make an excuse for her not going to the house to-day. He will be plaguing me again to-morrow. I can't keep Alice perpetually on bryonia.'

'No, I do not see myself how you can help letting Alice go to the house, and going yourself.'

'Good gracious! My dear father! To *that* woman!'

'Why not? You know absolutely nothing against her. Her manners leave nothing to be desired. She is highly educated. Except that she was a governess, and has no relations, she is unexceptionable.'

'Goodness me! Really, papa—and rector with the care of souls, and hoping to be a bishop! I do not understand this moral obtuseness. But there, men are differently constituted from women. I believe this—even clergymen rather prefer a spice of wickedness in good-looking women.'

'My dear Jane, you forget the respect due to me—to my age, my avocation, my relation to yourself.'

'I beg your pardon, papa; I was a little hot. I could not help it. What am I to do?'

'There, you ask my advice again, without the slightest intention of following it; nevertheless, I will give it. It will not do for you to hold aloof from the squiress. You will tear the parish into two factions, one siding with her, one with you. Percival will be extremely angry, and will refuse his subscriptions to the charities and bring the organization to a standstill. I shall have to dismiss either the Scripture reader or the mission woman. If I get rid of the former all the Evangelicals will be up in arms, and denounce me as gravitating to sacerdotalism; if I dismiss the mission-woman, I shall have all the High Church folk shaking the dust off their feet against me as wholly sunk into the slough of Puritanism. If I am not *via media*, I am nothing. But that is not all. Consider the very unpleasant situation we shall be in with the neighbours. The estrangement will be commented on, and there is simply no estimating the extravagance of the myths that will be formed relative to Percival's wife. You must also bear in mind that Lady Carminow is a woman free from prejudices and of a very decided character. How do you know but that Lady Carminow may take it into her head to visit and make much of Percival's wife? It is precisely the thing she is likely to do. And if she does this, do you not know that at once the whole neighbourhood, from Lady Tregontick down to every curate's wife, will veer round and vie with each other in courting her? Then where will you be?'

'Yes,' said Jane bitterly, 'Lady Carminow is capable of even that. I never can forgive her laying the foundation-stone of the Ranters' chapel at Cartuthers.'

'This must be weighed. Take my advice, Jane, and be decently civil to Mrs. Percival. Then you can always draw back at any time, or push forward, according to circumstances.'

'That I never will do. Never! I have too much self-respect to push forward with *her*.'

'Very well. Maintain a cold and ceremonious demeanour.'

'A cold and ceremonious demeanour I will, if I can. I cannot call black white; and if society should take up that person, so much the worse for society. I shall be clear of participation. So far—society has taken much the same view of her that I have.'

'Perhaps you managed that.'

'I have not spoken of her.'

'Exactly; and your chilling reception of any word spoken about her has made society suppose that there is more behind the scenes than there really is. You are uncharitable.'

'We shall never agree on this head,' said Jane, 'and therefore had better cease to speak about it. Something, however, must be settled, that I may not be worried by the importunities of Justinian. He has been won over now, and quite admires this precious step-mother.'

'What I desire, Jane, is, that there be no open quarrel. Maintain a semblance of good terms, for the sake of the parish, of the charities, the organization—for my sake. If it be said that there is a quarrel between me and my squire—who is also in a fashion a connection—it may stand in the way of my ministerial work.'

'Very well, papa,' said Jane, after some rumination, 'I will call, and by my manner, I trust, I shall be able to let that person understand, unless she wears rhinoceros hide, that exteriorly we are on speaking terms, but that acquaintanceship stops there. As to Alice, never will I allow her into the Manor House whilst that woman is there. I trust I value my child's immortal soul too highly to submit it to so great peril.'

'Peril—fiddle faddle.'

'You cannot touch pitch and not be defiled. You cannot associate with that sort of creature without a lowering of moral tone. I have told you, papa, the limits of my submission to your wishes. Now I will go, give Alice her bryonia, and then put on my bonnet, and walk with Justinian and make this call. I'll get it over at once.'

'Very well, my dear; now leave me to my sermon.'

When Jane Curgenven had made up her mind to do a thing that was disagreeable, she did it at once. Accordingly, after having administered the bryonia as a matter of conscience—not that Alice required it, but because she had said she would administer it—Jane Curgenven started with Justinian to call at the Manor.

She was by no means sure that the squiress would receive her, for she was aware that her behaviour to Theresa on the Sunday had been discourteous if not insolent. Jane had satisfied her own conscience as to her conduct. 'I am not a hypocrite. What I feel I express. If that person resents my treatment of her—it makes no difference to me—I have done what I undertook. If she receives me and is civil, it will be very clear that she has a guilty conscience, knows that I was in the right, and cringes to me to obtain my silence.'

But Jane did not find Theresa at home. The footman informed her that Mr. and Mrs. Curgenven had just left the house in the dog-cart for Liskeard. This was a relief to her mind. She left her card and departed.

Percival had driven his wife into Liskeard to have a look at the Pill-box, and decide what was to be done with its furniture. The lease would soon be up, and he was undecided whether to have the contents sold, or whether to remove them to Curgenven, or, again, whether he would sell part and retain a moiety of the articles. A groom sat behind in the dog-cart, so that Theresa and her husband could not converse with freedom during the drive. Moreover, on reaching the Pill-box, Bathsheba, who had returned to it, not having proved a success as housekeeper over a large establishment, had much to say, grievances to complain of, and inquiries to make relative to her favourite, Master Justinian.

After a while Percival was able to send the old woman about some commission in the town, and then he threw himself into his old smoking arm-chair, drew Theresa to him, put his arm about her, and looked round.

'I say, T., I had no conception it was so dirty and small. Do look at the smoked ceiling—see how shabby the paper is. Fancy enduring for so long a mangy red-flock paper! It is stuffy—one can hardly breathe here.'

'Poor old house! You were happy here—you must love it.'

'I don't see that. I was happy in spite of it. Why, T., think of the study at home, and then look at this.' Curgenven was home to him now.

'Upon my word, T., it is a wonder to me how men can consent to live in such tight quarters. It is not wholesome. There should be a law against it. The State takes care that in school-rooms there be sufficient cubic feet of air. It should forbid the construction of a house in which there is not breathing-space.'

'You have been in worse places than the Pill-box.'

'I know I have. I look back with horror on existence as it was then, just as does a butterfly, I suppose, on its chrysalis or caterpillar state.'

'But, Percival, suppose, like Sly, you were to wake up and find it all a dream, and you were back in the Pill-box, after a brief period of lordship?'

'Like Sly, I'd say: "Come, madam wife, sit by my side, and let the world slip; we shall ne'er be younger."'

'What, Percival, you would be content?'

'Not I—my only consolation would be that I should take you with me, heart's delight.'

Theresa put her arm about his neck.

'You would reconcile yourself to it?' she said.

'Never. Indeed, I am not sure but that, having you here, and not being able to give you the comforts and pleasures you deserve, I would feel it as an aggravation of the ill.'

'And yet, there is something to be said on the other side. It is no secret that the society of Philistia does not choose to accept me, and that this is an awkwardness and irritation to you. It places you in difficulties.'

'My own T., what care I for the society of Philistia? They showed me the cold shoulder when I lived in the Pill-box. Now good folk would like to be civil, but you puzzle them, because they think you have been an actress. Moreover, Jane has been telling tales, or hinting evil, after the fashion of the professionally pious. The Philistines are slow and timorous in the extreme, each afraid of the other. Do not concern yourself about them. I did not when in this house. I saw their carriages, their broughams and victorias and landaus pass, and never did one stop at this door. I got along without them, and I shall get along without them very comfortably till it pleases them to come round in their sluggish way. When they do, I accept it, not for my sake, but for yours. But as for the society of Philistia, I care for it not a snap. Bless you, T., dearest, we who have knocked about the world, and have brains of quicksilver, cannot find much pleasure in association with brains of white lead and linseed oil kneaded into a putty.'

'But, Percival, suppose that there had been some mistake about the property, and that a will were found.'

'Oh, you have had that nonsense propounded before you. Physic told me something of the sort. I do not believe for a moment that such a will exists. If it exists, why has it not been produced? The only person who would be interested in concealing or destroying such a will would be myself, and, by George! I'm not the man to do such a thing as that.'

'And if you found the will you would give it up?'

'I would—and then shoot myself.'

'And I——'

'My dearest T., I know as well as you that I should be merely an incumbrance to you. I cannot earn my livelihood. I tried as a surgeon, and after killing one or two of my patients, took to art, and never sold a picture. I had not learned perspective nor how to mix my colours. I went sheep-farming in the Rockies, and lost my sheep. I was taken in—bought a farm where there could be no provision for the sheep in the winter. They starved—I was ruined. I tried a clerkship, but I never in my life could do compound addition. I was kicked out. By Moses! T., I have tried being everything but being a waiter, and have made a botch of everything. The long and the short of it is, I'm an ass. Dear old Lambert took me up and cared for me. But I am incapable now as I was before of earning enough to find me in bread-and-butter. I have the best will, but I can't do it. I know what the end would be; you would take in needlework and wear these dear fingers to the bone to maintain me. Rather than that, I'd blow my brains out. I'd do the honest and right thing, if that will turned up, and then I'd make my *congé* to a world in which I don't know how to live except as a gentleman who has inherited a fortune which he is incapable of acquiring for himself. But there, away with these thoughts. Thank heaven!—I do it heartily—there is and can be no such will. Physic has tried to scare me, and some one—Jane, I suppose—has been playing on your fears. I snap my fingers under the nose of the bogie. There is no such will.'

CHAPTER XLI.

AGAIN: INVENI PORTUM.

Mr. Curgenven and Justinian went for a couple of nights to the house of Sir Sampson Tregontick for a shooting party. Justinian was a keen sportsman and a good shot; Percival was a sportsman by fits and starts, and not a successful one when he had the fit on him.

Theresa was not sorry that they were away; she had to form a decision as to her course with Physic, and then take it. She desired to be alone to consider what she should do. There was no one whom she could consult. She had no friend save her husband, and she was precluded from laying the matter before him. Bitterly, but with a sense of its ineffectuality, did she reproach herself for having placed in the agent's hand the weapon with which he now threatened her. If she had withheld the document, looked at it before it left her possession, this condition of affairs would not have existed.

She locked herself into her boudoir and opened the jewel-case. She drew from it the same jewels she had exhibited to Esther, and sat looking at them and musing. They—the finest of them, at all events—were heirlooms. Jane Curgenven had had them in her possession, but had conscientiously relinquished them. Theresa knew how much it must have cost Jane to resign these to herself; but Jane had done it, actuated by her strict sense of justice, with scrupulous rectitude, not retaining a single ring or brooch which she could not say had been a present to herself. And now Theresa was asked to alienate from the family these ornaments that had decorated the Curgenven ladies for several generations. Could she do it? She weighed the reasons urging to compliance with Physic's demand. They were cogent. If this will could be got from him and destroyed, then the Curgenven family would be delivered from the scandal of the revelation of the relation in which Captain Lambert had stood to Jane Pamphlet. This was the more important, as Theresa saw there was a growing inclination towards each other between the young people. A marriage between Justinian and Alice would heal everything, if only the secret of the invalidity of the marriage of Alice's mother could be kept from the world. The cousins were much together now, and their affection for each other was ripening.

Were Percival with herself and Justinian banished from Curgenven, then in all probability this nascent passion would be nipped in the bud. Percival would leave England and take his son with him. Jane Curgenven would do all that lay in her power to stop the intimacy.

For this reason it seemed worth while, at the cost of the jewellery, to secure the will. But, on the other hand, Theresa shrank from the consequences to herself. The day might come when the heirloom would be required of her; the jewels might be looked for after her death, and she would be accused of having misappropriated them. If they were asked for in her lifetime, she would not be able to give her reasons for having disposed of them, and it might reawaken suspicion in her husband, and turn away his heart from her. In future generations she would be spoken of as the dishonest woman who had fraudulently got rid of this treasure of the family. She could conceive in what terms Jane would refer to her, when Alice was squiress of Curgenven, and the family jewellery was not forthcoming wherewith to array her. Jane trampled on her in life and would trample on her when dead. The loss of the necklaces, and rings, and brooches would be used as corroborative proof against her character. Yet she, Theresa, was called on to make the sacrifice, not only to preserve her own fortune, but also Jane's good name. To save Jane's good name she must steep her own in ignominy!

Theresa put up the jewels, unlocked her door, and went out to walk in the garden. Her responsibility overwhelmed her, and her blood was in a fever, her brain in a whirl. At one moment she thought she would let Physic do his worst. At the next she shrank from the prospect of being cast on the world again, and was prepared to make any sacrifice to escape that. At one moment it seemed to her right to allow Captain Lambert's last wishes to take effect, at whatever cost to the family; and then she doubted whether it was his last wish to brand his child with bastardy. Surely, she said, he drew up that will on the supposition that I, on reappearing, would assert my right to be his wife or widow, claim the name, and put in some plea for sustentation from the property. I have not done any of this. I have been willing to let my rights be covered over; and to save his memory, to spare the feelings of his wife, to prevent a slur falling on his child, I have consented to let the past be as a thing that had not been. Under these circumstances the aspect of the case is altered. Had he thought I would do this, he would never have made that will.

I am fulfilling his best wishes in doing what I can at whatever cost to recover and destroy it.

She longed, she craved for advice, for some one to whom to confide her difficulties, and who, with clear sight into the ways of right and wrong, might lead her to do what was not only expedient for all concerned, but what was the course morally justifiable.

As if in answer to this cry out of her heart, the rector appeared before her.

'Oh, Mr. Pamphlet!' She ran to him with a flutter at her heart, a crimson spot in each cheek, and with both hands extended. 'Oh! Mr. Pamphlet, do help me! I want advice in great difficulty. Do come with me into the walled garden, and let me tell you all.'

'Most assuredly,' answered the rector blandly. 'Providence and the bishop have placed me here as pastor of souls, to guide the doubtful, strengthen the weak, raise the fallen, and clear the clouds from before all darkened eyes, to the best of my poor ability.'

'That is exactly what I want—what I want above everything in the world,' gasped Theresa. 'Oh, how kind, how good of you!'

'Not at all; it is my duty, by virtue of my office and commission.'

She threw open the garden gate, and both entered. There was a long wall against which old figs grew, and she turned to that. No gardeners were about. In the fig walk they could be alone, unobserved and not overheard. They paced together the whole length of the walk before she spoke; they turned at the end, by the tool-house, and then he said encouragingly, 'Now—what is it?'

'Mr. Pamphlet, my poor husband, in his will——'

'Good gracious! He has gone out rabbit-shooting—there has not occurred an accident?'

'No. I mean Captain Lambert.'

'Oh!'

'He made a will by which he provided for your daughter under her maiden name, and for his child by her.'

'Oh!' Mr. Pamphlet's face grew long and blank.

'This is in existence, but has not been produced. We are threatened with its production.'

'Merciful powers! If this get about—and any one could go to Somerset House and see the will for a shilling—then my chances of elevation to a bish—I mean my ministerial efficacy in the parish would be crippled!'

'The will leaves everything to your daughter and grandchild.'

'Yes—but—I would rather sacrifice everything than have this come out.'

'Then what do you think should be done?'

'*I*—*I* think—*I*——'

'There has been an offer made to compromise the matter. That is to say, the will will be delivered into my hands on condition that I surrender the family jewels.'

'What, to suppress—tear up the will! But that is a felony. Why did you mention this to me?'

The rector's face became pink, showing doubly so by contrast with his white whiskers.

'Am I justified in accepting this offer?'

'Oh, don't ask me. For Heaven's sake, consult any one—Percival, Physic—any one but me. I don't want to be mixed up in this matter at all.'

'I cannot speak of it to my husband, for you know his direct manner; he would say, "Prove the will," without considering results, how they affected himself or any one else. I cannot consult Mr. Physic for other reasons. I have no one to confer with but yourself in this matter—in this difficulty.'

'Oh! good gracious! I want to hear no more about it. It might get into the papers. I had better know nothing; then, should there be any trouble, I could safely protest my ignorance.'

'But, Mr. Pamphlet! it affects your interests, as you yourself admitted.'

'Ye—s.' He dropped the umbrella he was carrying from his shaking hand, and when he stooped to pick it up, his hat fell on the path from his shaking head.

'I have to decide, and decide at once, whether to sacrifice the jewels or not.'

'But the jewels are an heirloom, are most valuable. You have really no right—oh, why did you consult me about this? I am involved in a matter out of which I wish to keep clear.'

'It is for your own sake and your daughter's that I consult you.'

'I see—I see—but, goodness! I do not know what to say.'

'Would you advise me to allow of the production of the will?'

'That would be fatal to my interests. It would blast my family with eternal disgrace.'

'Then shall I surrender the jewels?'

'That would be robbery of the family. You have no right to dispose of them.'

'Then what am I to do?'

'Is there no other way? can you not frighten—threaten the person, whoever he be, that has this will?'

'How threaten—frighten?'

'He is committing felony in retaining it.'

'That would but force him to produce it.'

'I see. My head is turning. Can't you say you have no right to dispose of the jewels?'

'He knows that as well as I.'

'Then—I really do not know what to say. I had best advise nothing, and I must adapt myself to whatever happens as best I can.'

'Then, Mr. Pamphlet, I want guidance in my doubt, and you cannot give it me?'

'I don't want to compromise myself.'

'And you cannot advise?'

'No—I'd rather not. It might get into the papers.'

'Nor clear the clouds from my darkened eyes?'

'Indeed, no—oh dear, no!' After a long pause and deep meditation, and much combing of his white whiskers with the disengaged fingers, Mr. Pamphlet said, 'And yet I can give you my advice. I was wrong in saying I could not—my matured and weighty advice in this matter——'

'And that is——?'

'To form your own opinion on it, and having formed, to follow it.'

They left the garden, and Theresa walked with the rector through the churchyard to the garden gate of the parsonage. He avoided all further reference to the subject of consultation, and spoke of the weather, the rabbit-shooting, the schools, and parochial matters. The night had begun to close in. It was not dark, but gloomy, a dull leaden shadow hung over the landscape, and the distance was obscure. Theresa turned at the gate, after having with a heavy heart bidden the rector farewell.

'Shall I go back with you to the house?' he asked hesitatingly; 'night is falling rapidly.'

'No, thank you, I know my way; the white space of the path is visible enough.'

'And you are not afraid to go through the churchyard alone?'

'Why should I? I have not annoyed the dead.'

'There are two or three paths; mind not to take that to the left; it leads to the place where the heating apparatus is, and there are steps to it.'

'You need not fear.'

Then Theresa set off at a quick pace to cross the graveyard. The church rose as a huge black patch against the sky before her.

The rector also turned to walk home, but changed his mind, and said to himself, 'I will wait till she is through.'

Theresa did not know this. She stepped on, more troubled in mind than before. She had sought light, and been given none. The day was appointed on which she was to meet Physic at Tolmenna, and by then the decision must be made one way or other.

As she came near the flat tombstone on which she had reposed on Sunday, she was startled to see in the darkness a figure as of a man seated where she had been, and he seemed to be doing what she had done, tracing the letters on the stone with his finger. Her heart stood still, her feet were arrested. Then, as he traced, she saw each letter shine phosphorescent in the dark:—

Inveni portum; spes et Fortuna valete.

She uttered an exclamation of terror.

He turned his face, a lambent light played over it, and she knew her first husband.

With a cry she sank to the ground and lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XLII.

A THIRD ALTERNATIVE.

Theresa did not return to full consciousness at once. There came to her glimpses of light and bursts of sound, episodes of wakefulness to movement, and to a sight of drawn curtains and a sound of whispers, and then tracts of insensibility.

When she did awake to full possession of her faculties, she found herself in bed in her own room, and she heard the voices of her husband and of the doctor. Both had been summoned.

The first sentence she heard and understood was spoken by the medical attendant. He said: 'She must be kept perfectly quiet, and not be bothered about the jam. Her heart is affected.'

Theresa raised herself on her elbow, and said: 'Yes, I knew that—since my last illness.'

'It was the jam—and very provoking,' exclaimed the surgeon.

But Percival ran to the bedside and took her hand between his and said: 'You are better, T.; nearly right again! That is capital!'

'What has happened?' she asked.

'My dearest T., you have given us such a fright?'

'And I——' she mused. 'Yes, I have had a fright too.'

'It was the rats,' threw in the surgeon. ''Twas vexing. I allow, and sixteen pots of jam. All the brandy cherries, also.'

'You have had a succession of fainting fits. You fell back into one as soon as brought round. We were afraid you would slip away altogether, between our fingers, in one of them. Then, T., what should I have done?'

She looked affectionately in his face, and he stooped and kissed her.

'I had a fright; I suppose that was it,' said Theresa meditatively. 'Yes, I was coming through the churchyard——' Then she interrupted herself, turned to the doctor, and asked, 'May I get up?'

'Not to-night. Perhaps to-morrow. But, mind this; don't you go exciting yourself over pots of jam and brandy cherries any more.'

'Pots of jam?'

'Ah, yes! I know all about it. I made inquiries, and found that the rats had been at the store closet, and had eaten the parchment off sixteen pots, so that the fruit was mildewed, and had in the same way uncovered the brandy cherries, put their tails in, sucked them, and absorbed all the juice. It was very vexing, but you must not fret over these matters. You will have to buy, that is all. Don't worry yourself any more. Leave all that to the housekeeper, and keep your heart emotionless. It must be saved all kind of agitation.'

'I had forgotten about the jams.'

'Oh, no, that was it! The housekeeper told me how it disturbed you. You've been brooding over it—that is what has done it. Now, dear lady, be brave, be heroic; banish the jams and the brandy cherries from your thoughts, and set yourself to get well. That is my best advice. The heart is a delicate and capricious instrument, like a chronometer. It must not be treated jerkily, but gingerly. You understand?'

When the doctor was gone, Theresa made Percival take a chair by her bedside, and said: 'Now, tell me all about it.'

'The old boy found you.'

'Who is he?'

'I mean Mr. Pamphlet. He came to the house to say that he had found you in the churchyard in a fainting fit.'

'I dare say. I had been talking to him in the walled garden, and I accompanied him through the yard to his wicket-gate. Then I turned.' She pressed Percival's hand with a nervous spasm, and said: 'I saw Lambert there—I mean in the graveyard.'

'Fudge!'

'I did. He was sitting on a flat stone, and was writing on it in Latin.'

'Now, T., that is clearly impossible. Dear old Lambert had no more knowledge of Latin than

Amo amas,
I loved a lass!

and, unfortunately for him, he loved two, and was not off with the old before he was on with the new. That's the length of his Latin. You won't make me believe he's been to a grammar school in kingdom come, and has become so ready with his classics that he can scribble in the Latin tongue.'

'I do not quite mean that, Percy. I had seen this tombstone on Sunday. The lines on it are—

"Inveni portum; spes et Fortuna valete;
Nil mihi vobiscum: ludite nunc alios."'

'They are beyond me.'

'I am no scholar, but I think I know the sense. It is this: I have found harbour. Hope and Good Fortune, farewell. I have nothing more to do with you. Go now, make sport of others.'

'I don't like the sentiment at all,' said Percival; 'but I can't say that it did not apply to poor old Lambert. However, the whole thing is nonsense and fiddlesticks.'

'I saw him. He drew his finger along the letters, and then they became luminous. When I uttered an exclamation, he turned his face round to me.'

'My dear T.! the whole is a delusion. You have been over-exciting yourself—not about the jam and cherries in brandy, as the doctor thinks, but about other things. There has been Physic, or some one, frightening you concerning a will of Lambert's. I know there has. You spoke to me about it. Very well; the point is established. You have been fretting over Lambert. Very natural that, when a little out of health, you should fancy you saw him. Then you say you read that inscription on the tombstone last Sunday. You had been thinking of that, and you came to associate Lambert with the words. So, when your heated imagination conjured him up, it also made him scribble those lines. I don't know that I ever came across a ghost story so simple of explanation. Send the thoughts of the poor old fellow back into the grave to sleep with him, and bother the Latin. It is not a fit inscription over any Christian. And, to please the doctor, don't think of the jam and brandy cherries. So you will be all right in a day or two.'

'I shall not be all right till the battle is over.'

'What battle?'

'The battle of life.'

'You have no cause to fight it.'

'Not, perhaps, the same battle as of old. But I cannot rest—I will not say on my laurels, for I have won none, but on a bed of poppies.'

'What have you to disturb you now?'

'Formerly, in that Bohemia in which we had to live—though neither of us belonged to it—we had a struggle for existence. I had to earn my daily bread, to strive under a thousand adverse circumstances, and to maintain my integrity through all—not an easy matter in Bohemia. The atmosphere is enervating there to the moral sense, though stimulating to the mental powers. However, I held my own; but it was a hard fight, and at last I broke down. My heart gave way, and I was forbidden to undertake any more professional work in concerts. Then I came very near to starvation. You know the rest. Your dear hand helped me.'

She looked fondly in Percival's face, and put up her lips to kiss him.

'You helped me. You placed me where I am. I am in a new sphere.'

'I see—you worry now because you have Jane and the world of Common Place to fight. The truly pious and infinitely narrow don't know what to make of you. Leave Jane alone, and concern yourself no more about her. It is a leaden weight crushing your heart. Shake it off.'

'It is not that. I am making no fight for position, or for recognition in my position. I am content with the place, your love, and Justinian's regard. I have had other troubles.'

'Oh, that affair about the three hundred pounds! Indigent relatives. Confound them! Now, take my advice, T. It is that I gave you when they began to worry you. Refer them all to Physic, or to me; we will settle them between us. Do not allow them to tease you any longer. Now that your health suffers, it won't do. I shall be angry, and send the police after them.'

'It was not altogether that——'

'Then what was it?'

She remained silent. She could not tell him.

'Now, look here, dearest T.,' said Percival. 'If you have any bother, put it into Physic's hands. He is paid to take this sort of thing off our shoulders, and he can manage it much better than we can. It is his business, and it don't worry him. Indeed, he rather likes it. However, let all these matters be put aside now. You must on no account excite yourself. Let us change the topic. What will amuse you? What do you say to letting me see the Curgenven jewellery? I never have seen it. Come, let me have the key, and I will bring the case here. It will divert your thoughts, and will give me a pleasure.'

'Oh, Percy, please not!'

'Yes—your mind must be directed into another channel. Women love jewellery. Where is the key?'

She gave him what he asked for, and in a few minutes he brought the case to her room. Then Percival moved the lamp near to the bed, and lighted all the candles in the room. 'I must see the diamonds sparkle,' he said.

He unlocked the case and produced each article in the order in which it lay in the velvet-lined trays.

'I have a list of them all and their estimated values,' said Percival. 'That was all taken after Lambert's death, but there is a list that Jane gave me as well. And I see there is one in the box. It is as well to have several lists in case of accident or robbery.'

Percival continued for some time trifling with and admiring the jewels, under the impression that he was giving pleasure to his wife, or at all events diverting her thoughts from the topics that had occupied them.

'T., my love, next year Justinian is of age, and we will give a great ball then. You shall wear the diamond necklace Queen Anne gave to Lady Margaret Curgenven, and the tiara also. It will be a pleasure to see you in them, and I'll swear finer diamonds are not to be seen in Cornwall. I said something to-day about a ball, and you should have seen how Lady Tregontick and the girls jumped. She at once told me that she was coming to call on you. And you may be quite certain that every mother with a marriageable daughter will put her scruples in her pocket and come and see you—for Justinian's sake. I do not think there are many who would not give their ears to see a daughter married to the heir of Curgenven. The women have been hanging back because Jane has done mischief. But Jane does not direct their consciences; self-interest does that.'

He looked round at his wife. Her eyes were closed.

'You are tired,' he said; 'I am afraid I have talked too much. I will put the jewels away where you keep them, and bring back the key. The place is safe, unless a burglar got into your room.'

Percival kissed Theresa and left. Her hands were folded under the bedclothes over her heart.

What was to be done? After what Percival had said, it was not possible for her to dispose of the jewels. Next year she would be required to wear them—at the coming of age of Justinian. She was woman enough to feel satisfaction at the thought that in spite of Jane Curgenven she would be recognized by the county. What Percival had said was true. The squirearchy, or rather the female adherents of the squires, would swallow their prejudices, tread down their doubts, and receive her among themselves, if not cordially, at all events formally, for the sake of a ball and of the chance of catching Justinian. Jane would, of course, not come to the ball, but would hear the carriages drive past the rectory on the way to the Hall, carriage succeeding carriage, and be taught thereby that she was defeated—the scorned woman was Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven. No one loves to be trampled on. Theresa cared for no better revenge than this, though she had in her power the means of executing a terrible one on her rival. She might bow herself and bring down the house, but, like Samson, to her own destruction; and it would be poor satisfaction to be buried under the same ruins with Jane Curgenven.

The morrow was the day of decision.

If Theresa remained at home, the affairs of the Curgenven family would settle themselves. The wheel would turn, and the revolution would be complete. She, and Percival, and Justinian would be cast on the world, and Jane, with a blasted name and her child branded as a bastard, would occupy Curgenven without being qualified to bear the name of Curgenven.

What could she do? She could not endure this prospect. Wearied to death, worn out with struggle, her health failing, her spirits broken, she was unequal to the task of recommencing life in poverty. She thought of the drudgery of existence when every shilling has to be considered. The strain to make both ends of a very short purse meet—she was unequal to it. Twenty years ago she would cheerily have faced poverty. It was now twenty years too late.

But how avert the danger?

The jewels she could not surrender. Even if she suffered them to be held in pawn, could she be sure of raising the money to redeem them when needed? Could she be sure that Percival would not ask to see them when they were out of the house? Could she be sure that Physic would not make away with them? perhaps replace the finest diamonds with imitation stones which she could not detect. Was there no alternative, no third course possible? Theresa thought of the words on the tombstone, and felt a longing for rest, even if it could be in the harbour of the grave only. For herself it would have been well had she not recovered from the swoon into which she had fallen. But she loved Percival. She loved him with all her heart. He was the one object to which she clung. She clung, knowing his infirmity, but forgiving that for the sake of the great good there was in him. For his sake she would live—live to deliver him, if possible, from the danger menacing him.

Would Physic use the will as he threatened? Might she not trust that he would see that his own interests lay in keeping it in his desk? But there would be no rest from his exactions, no relief from annoyance so long as Physic retained the document. Theresa again asked herself, Was there no third course open to her? And suddenly, with a scorching flash like a lightning-stroke athwart her brain, came the words of the rector. There was a third course. She might threaten him, and wring the will from him through playing on his fears.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A MEETING.

Ting! Ting! Ting!

The clock on the stairs struck three. Three in the afternoon. And then the chimes in it began:

> There is nae luck about the house,
> There is nae luck ava'.

The clock had been an acquisition of Captain Curgenven, a lover of mechanism.

Theresa started and shivered.

She was in her boudoir, seated by a small fire, in a dream. At her entreaty Percival had gone back to the Tregonticks' along with Justinian for the rabbit-shooting. He was reluctant to leave her, but she had insisted. She assured him that it would worry her to think he was detained from his sports, that her mind would be more easy if he went, that she was much better after a night's rest. Percival, always disposed to be sanguine, acquiesced at once in the notion that she was better. He was confident that in a day or two she would be herself again. He held that the doctor had exaggerated her condition. Doctors always do such things so as to enhance their merits if they cure the malady.

But Percival was less willing to accept his dismissal. Notwithstanding his confidence, there lurked a doubt at the bottom of his heart.

'Dear old T.,' said he, 'I can't go and amuse myself when you are ill, and moping in your sick-room. 'Pon my life, I shan't enjoy it, I shall be thinking about you.'

Nevertheless she persuaded him to go; she wished it, and her will was the strongest of the two. He promised to be home for dinner, and Theresa undertook to come down to dinner at half-past seven.

He had been away since eleven, and had lunched at the house of the Tregonticks.

As the afternoon crept on, so did Theresa's uneasiness. At four o'clock Physic would be at Tolmenna with the original will, and if it was to be secured, it must be secured then by her. The strokes of the clock on the stairs announcing three came on her like the shock of an earthquake. The decisive moment had arrived when she must go. It mattered not that she was unfit to go—go she must. An interview was before her certain profoundly to agitate her, at a time when she was warned to avoid all agitation. Nevertheless she must run the risk.

She opened the door and stole lightly down the great staircase, walking on the deep pile carpet, and her tread awaking no sound. No one was in the hall.

She had thrown a kerchief over her head, and drawing this closely round her, she went out on the terrace. There was no one about there, and she went to the bungalow without encountering any one, or observing any one, either in the grounds or at a window of the house, the fact being that an Italian boy with a barrel-organ and a monkey in an evening dress suit and white tie was at the back door, and servants, gardeners, and grooms had rushed into the kitchen yard to observe the antics of the creature. Theresa could hear the strains of the instrument, and now and then a squeal from a servant-maid, as the monkey ran to her and pulled her apron.

She entered the bungalow and pushed into the smoking-room, where she hastily took down one of the pistols hung on the rack against the wall, concealed it, and left the bungalow in the direction of the moor. Her heart was beating fast. The pulses bounded in her throat, and she gasped for breath. But no sooner was she outside the park walls and on the open common than her courage returned, and her heart beat more evenly. She looked round. What a wonderful country that was! In our great cities the mansion of a millionaire and the house crowded with squalid and starving wretches are within a stone's throw. Here was wild and barren country untouched as in the times when the first savage inhabitants of Britain roved there, and behind the paling—divided by that only—the richest park land, growing cedars and oaks and chestnuts of centuries, on land cultivated through ages, and become docile to the hand of the landscape gardener of the nineteenth century. A thousand years—nay, two thousand intervened between this side and that of the park wicket. Within the gate you and the scenery belonged to the present epoch, outside it—in your modern costume and with your modern ideas—you are an anachronism.

But that was not all. A step from among the trees on to the moor was a step from one atmosphere into another; from the warm, sleepy, soft air of the south into the bracing, stimulating cold air of the north; it was a stride from one latitude to another. Nor was that all. It was a passage from one flora to another; from garden flowers of flaming hue, from spreading forest trees, to pale heather and bog asphodel, to grey moss and lichen soot-black or snow-white, and to no sign of tree other than a stunted thorn.

The afternoon was windy; clouds, white, piled up in masses, sailed as icebergs in the cold dark-blue sky, and cast indigo shadows over the moorland. Between the cloud masses the sun fell over stretches of barren waste, lighting it a pale sulphurous yellow. There had been rain. Some of the heavy clouds had burst and poured forth a deluge. Even now to the west all was a blur of blue grey cut by the half arch of a rainbow.

It seemed to Theresa, as she walked on the springy turf, that her sickness had passed away, that with the fresh moor air she inhaled new strength. Discouragement was gone, she was sanguine of success. Physic was a coward. She had but to frighten him, and he would give way. The jewel-case she had with her, under her cloak and left arm. It was locked, and she had left the key at home in her desk.

The lapwings were wheeling and screaming, and now and then came the pipe of the plover. A ring-ousel started up as Theresa approached some old streaming works, flew a little way, circled, uttered a plaintive remonstrance, rose, flew a little further, again remonstrated, and continued the same course for some distance, then gave it up and disappeared.

Theresa's way led past the Hurlers, rings of upright stones planted in a prehistoric period for an unknown purpose. Three of these circles remain; a line of stones has been destroyed that at one time stretched across the moor to it, only two of these having been spared, standing about five and a half feet above the ground. The story goes that one Sunday the men of three parishes met on the moor to hurl a silver ball, and see which parish sent forth the man who was the best hurler. But as an interlude they began to throw stones, and they threw the granite slabs to the top of the nearest hill, one on top of the other, which stand to this day, and now constitute the Cheeswring. Then the men of two of the parishes, Linkinghorne and Southill were faint, and said they would throw no more till they had drunk ale. So they sent off two of their party to run for jars of beer. Then the wrath of Heaven was kindled against the Sabbath-breakers, and all were turned into stone, and at a distance from the three circles are to be seen the two messengers petrified in the act of running.[1] In the flying lights and shadows there was something startling in the appearance of these clusters of standing stones about the height of a man, some black with lichen, others white with spar, now dark against a background of moor that lay in sunshine, themselves overshadowed by a sailing cloud. Then the condition was reversed, all the waste behind steeped in purple, these stones gleaming out like ghosts in a dance; and in the rapidly shifting light and shades they seemed endowed with motion, to be tossing, and lightly careering in circle, whilst the two outrunners in stooping position actually appeared to advance in their race for ale. No wonder that the place is avoided at night as 'whisht,' when even by day it has such an unearthly aspect.

But Theresa had no thoughts to bestow on bird or stone; she hugged the precious case to her side, and with her right hand felt the pistol that she had passed through the leather girdle round her waist.

She could not stand still without feeling the earth heave and lurch under her feet, and her head spin. But whilst walking she was unconscious of her weakness; she was animated by the hope to have done for ever with the annoyance caused by Physic. She had resolved, as soon as she had got the will from him, that she would persuade Percival to dismiss the man from his service. One so unscrupulous in the matter of the will would be unscrupulous in other matters.

Theresa had hardly reached Tolmenna before Physic arrived, riding upon a grey cob. He wore tight breeches and boots. In his hand was a crop. He had on a long great-coat.

'How do, ma'am?' said he, with insolently familiar nod as he trotted past. 'I'll hitch up and be at your service directly.' Then changing his mind he drew rein. 'I say—I heard a rumour that your ladyship was ill, so I e'en rode to Curgenven to inquire. They told me you were better, but not fit to come down-stairs. On my word, I didn't expect to see you here, after that. I came on to have a look at my bit of property, where I'm going to open a mine.' He turned his keen eyes round, raised his voice, and shouted, 'Hallo there! What, you gal! what are you doing on my lands? I'll have you up for trespass.' This to Esther, whom his sharp eye had detected.

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[1] So the story as told the author near the spot.

He was off his cob in a minute. 'Look here, gal,' said he, 'you take the bridle and lead my grey up and down, and I'll give you a fourpenny-bit, which is more money than you have earned honestly so far, and having got will know how to spend.'

He threw the rein to Esther, who came forward sullenly and doubtfully, and seemed inclined to refuse. When, however, she saw that Physic wished to speak to Mrs. Curgenven, she took the rein with an impatient jerk of the hand and a toss of her head.

'Now look here, young savage,' said Physic, 'I've a word or two with this lady here that ain't for your ears. It's about the mine, it is, I'm going to open here—wheal[1] something or other. I'll call it after her, whatever her Christian name is, with her good permission, and that's what I'll ask her, so sheer off to leeward.'

Esther looked at Theresa with inquiry, and when she saw that it was the lady's desire that she should comply with the orders given, she led the horse away in the direction of the Hurlers, and a mass of granite fragments heaped into a cairn hid her from the agent and Theresa.

'So then,' said Physic, 'you've come notwithstanding sickness, or was that put on, eh? You don't relish the prospect of turning out into the cold. I would not were I in the squire's place or yours. By George! it makes me laugh to think how cleverly you played your little game. I confess I was taken aback, and could not understand it when you gave me the sack. "Why!" said I to myself, "confound the woman, is she demented? Here is she without a penny to bless herself with, and when she gets an offer from me—an offer at which ten thousand girls would jump—she refuses me." I couldn't make out the sense of it. I knew you were clever. I didn't know how clever. I allow you, I was sore when I heard that Mr. Percival had succeeded in securing you, or rather that you had succeeded in securing him. But I laughed. It was darned clever, and it explained the puzzle. However, you don't escape scot free. You'll have to pay me for the honour and enjoyment of being squiress of Curgenven. So now—which is it to be—a thousand-pound cheque or the jewel-box?'

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[1] Wheal (huel) is Cornish for mine.

'Have you brought the will?'

'Rather think I have.'

'Not a copy? The original?'

'Do you doubt me? Fair dealing is my word.'

'Mr. Physic,' said Theresa, 'I have been ill, and ordered by the doctor not to be excited, or to be troubled about any matter, as my heart is affected. I have come here this evening at great risk to myself, and I ask you, under the circumstances, to give me a little longer time in which to consider what you have said, and the alternatives set before me.'

'Not another day, not another hour! Very sorry, 'pon my soul I am, that you've been ill. I can see it in your handsome face that you ain't up to mark. But, bless you! it's like having a tooth drawn, the worst is the making up your mind to it. It's the thinking over them beautiful diamonds and emeralds as has upset you. Of course it is. A lady don't fancy parting with such things as those. It is like taking the blood out of her heart. I'm tremendously sorry you have been worrited over them jewels, but it comes in the course of business. It's a deal; you give me the jewels and I'll give you the will. I reckon it's worth more to you to have the will than to have a few trays of gewgaws. Why—the will means a comfortable house, a fine estate, and a position as a county lady. You will have the means of buying other jewellery—any amount of sham; and who's to tell that it is sham? I know what you're afraid of—lest these should be asked after. Leave that to me. I'll get you shams as 'll pass very well. You haven't said a word to the squire, I suppose, about this affair?'

Theresa shook her head. She had drawn her long dark cloak about her, and wrapped it round her with her arms crossed under the cloak. Very white and deathlike her face appeared by contrast with the black cloth cloak. The cloak was one Percival had given her, a Belgian cloak, such as is worn by the women in the markets of Bruges and Ghent, with a silk-lined hood, and a brass clasp at the breast. She had tied a purple silk kerchief over her hair, knotted under her chin.

'You insist on the thing being settled at once?' she asked in a low tone, and slowly.

'Most assuredly. Look here. I'm going to work a company and have a mine here, and I need money to set the affair on wheels.'

'Let me look at the will.'

He put his hand into a pocket of his long great-coat, a pocket on the inside, and drew forth a packet.

'Here you are,' said he. 'And I pray you to observe that I have got capacious pockets. I came provided so that I could stow the jewel-case away in one of them.'

'Give me the will.'

'Thank you,' said Physic with a laugh. 'Give you the will, and away you would run fleet as a doe, thinking to make off with it, and without fulfilling your part of the bargain. How am I to know that you have brought the jewel-case with you?'

'Satisfy yourself with your own eyes.'

Theresa drew forth the case and held it before her.

'Very well,' said the agent. 'So far so good. Now, you put that in my hand, and I will put the document you so covet into yours. We'll deliver up simultaneously.'

Slapping his boot with his crop he turned and looked about him. Esther was not visible, but the cob was; she had thrown herself down on the granite cairn, and was allowing the cob to munch the grass as far as he could reach, restrained by her hand and the bridle, that she had unbuckled on one side of the bit.

'It's all right,' said Physic. He put the whip into his mouth, across, and held out the will with one hand whilst laying hold eagerly of the case with the other.

Theresa at once secured the will in her bosom.

'Wait, my beauty!' said the agent, removing the whip from his mouth, 'I've not done yet. Where is the key?'

'Here!' exclaimed Theresa, suddenly drawing the pistol, and presenting it at his head.

Physic sprang back.

'Now,' said Theresa, 'give me back the case immediately.'

'Oh, yes,' answered the agent, recovering himself. 'A pretty trick for a stage-player. But it won't do; you can't scare me. Why, bless you! you ain't got the pistol cocked, much less charged.'

Theresa at once drew back the cock.

'Give me up the jewel-case!'

Physic whirled his crop about to bring it down across her hand. 'You hit me once across the knuckles,' said Physic savagely; 'now I'll pay you with interest. By George! I'll give you a wale across them lily-whites!'

He swung the crop again, and set his teeth. In a moment, before the blow fell, there was an explosion.

Theresa saw the flash, felt the shock in her hand without understanding what had happened; saw Physic stagger, as though tipsy, and fall in a heap on the sward.

CHAPTER XLIV.

OFF.

Theresa stood like one of the Hurlers or Runners, motionless, petrified. She could not realize at once what had happened; she was not conscious of having drawn the trigger. Her finger had contracted instinctively before the fall of the whip. That the pistol was loaded had not entered her imagination. She had forgotten altogether that Esther had charged it, offered it to her, and when she had declined to experimentalize with it, had replaced it loaded on the rack a few days ago. She had thought to frighten Physic, certainly not to kill him. He lay motionless before her, with a bullet in his heart. Theresa's senses were sharpened to acuteness at that moment; she saw, and heard, and smelt with preternatural keenness—saw Physic on the ground, with two boot-soles turned towards her, and saw that the sole of one boot had been patched, and that the patching nails were bright; she heard the cob whinny; and she smelt gunpowder. But she could not think; she could not put together the chain of events, and understand how this terrible accident had taken place. She was roused by the voice of Esther.

'Oh, jimmeny! You've done it!'

She tried to turn her head and to speak; she could do neither. Esther went to the fallen man, touched him, looked in his face, and came back to Theresa.

'He's dead, I reckon, dead as a want' (mole) 'on a linney' (cattle-shed) ' door. Whativer is to be done?'

Theresa was in no condition to speak.

'I say—now,' Esther looked at the dead man, then at the lady, ''tes a hanging matter, I reckon. Lord! I often said as I would like to do it, and do it I would; but now 'tes done, it's another matter altogether, and I never 'd ha' picked up courage to do it. But, Lor'! what is to be done now? It'll niver do for them to take you to prison and hang you—a lady, and so good. I'll tell 'ee what—I'll take it all on myself. Ees—I will for sure sartain, and let 'm try to catch me. They won't do it. There, lady! don't y' take on and be afraid. I'll pretend I did it; and if they do hang me, it's no great odds, I'm sure.'

Theresa did not stir, she remained stupefied with terror; then Esther laid hold of her arm, shook her, and walked with her a few paces away from the corpse.

'Look y' here,' said Esther, 'what do y' mean now by holding thickey pistern? Why, them as seed y' wi' her sure enough would say you did it. Give her to me.'

She twisted the weapon out of the hand of Theresa, who now drew a long breath, and put up her hand to her brow. When her eyes no longer rested on the body with the upturned patched boot-soles, her spellbound condition began to yield.

'It couldn't be helped,' said Esther reassuringly. 'I reckon that when gran'mither cast the eye on him and ill-wished him, it were sure to come from one or other. He ought never to ha' turned us out o' Tolmenna. He brought it on his own head. What had he done to y' that you took the pistern to 'n? But never mind, you can tell me that another day. Now be peart' (smart), 'and get back to Curgenven, and leave the rest to me.'

Theresa was in that condition in which obedience to another's will was the only course she could take. She could neither think for herself, nor consider the consequences of what had taken place; she therefore drew her cloak about her with a cramp-like spasm, and walked in the direction indicated by Esther, at first slowly, hardly dragging one foot after the other, then quicker, and finally almost at a run. As she placed distance between herself and the corpse, animation returned, her muscles became flexible, her pulses throbbed, and the terror, instead of striking her with paralysis, became a goad urging her to fly the spot. Panting, shuddering, bathed in perspiration, she passed through the park, re-entered the house, and regained her room unnoticed. When there she divested herself of kerchief and cloak, put them away, and then sank into her chair, covered her eyes, and burst into tears.

Wherever she went, whatever she undertook, she was led into disaster; she had, however, never previously been brought into such a situation as the present, that threatened not herself only, but the whole family into which she had been taken.

In the meanwhile Esther had stepped back to the body; she knelt beside it, and assured herself that life was extinct. Then she stood with folded arms, her feet in a heather bush, musing, and looking at the dead man. She had the pistol in her hand. She was not oppressed with any of the horror or fear that had taken hold of Theresa. In her rude mind she was not capable of realizing all that death was. The man who had sent her grandfather to prison, who had turned the old people and herself out of their house and had torn it down, was lying dead before her, and he had been served as he deserved. He was now innocuous, and the main thought that occupied her mind was whether it would now be possible for her grandparents to return to Tolmenna and rebuild the ruins. She had hated the agent, and yet, as he lay before her dead, with his ugly face turned to the light, and the flying shadows and sun-gleams dancing over it, she was conscious of a sense of pity.

'Deary me, now!' said she. ''Tes curious. I couldn' kill the hoodwall, and I took aim at 'n. I reckon 'twere this very pistern; and sure then I said I'd never 'a missed had I fired at Physic. But I'm not so sartain neither now if he'd 'a stood facin' me as I'd 'a had the sperit to do it. Deary life, it's edication does it. There's me can't read vitty at all, and the lady there—as easy as anything. Her shot 'n—straight on end. It's edication does it.'

She stooped and looked at Physic once more, and now saw the jewel-case that had fallen from his hand in the convulsion of death.

She recognized this at once, and wondered how he had come by it. She took it up, and going to the ruins of the cottage secreted it in a place she well knew under the floor, where her grandfather had been accustomed to hide his money.

Then she walked away in the direction of cultivated land.

As she was descending from the moor into a lane she met Pike the horsebreaker, leading Physic's cob by the rein.

'I say, Esther Morideg! Have y' seen Mr. Physic anywheres? Here's his cob running loose. He passed my house not an hour ago, and said to my missus he were going to Tolmenna about his mine. I caught the cob running down the lane.'

'Physic is dead!' said Esther. 'I've shot 'n; and here's the pistern. Take it back to Curgenven.'

'You've shot him?'

'Aye, I reckon. Why did he turn gran'fer out o' the house? What else could he expect, and ill-wished too by gran'mother!'

'Physic dead!'

'Aye! and here be the pistern as have done it. I borrowed her t'other day I were i' the bungalow up to Curgenven, and I took away the pistern wi' me. I thought I'd punish that chap for turning us out o' our house, and tearing it abroad. I've done it, and there be the tool back. They'll be after me to put me i' the clink, I reckon, so I'm off.'

She gave him the pistol.

'No, thank you,' said he. 'They'll be having me pinned up if they find me wi' that. You come along of me to where there's some one else, and tell the tale, and then it's right enough.'

'Very well.'

'Come along to the old turnpike house, my missus 'll hear what you have to say, and then you can leave the pistol there and welcome, but I wi'n't take it wi'out a witness, and risk the noose round my neck. He were an aggravating sort o' a chap, he were, and I don't blame you. He didn't treat your folks as 'a ought to 'a treated 'em, and this be the consekence. Well, it's a pity if they swing you, and a shame too. But I've gotten all I wanted from Physic, and so I don't bear him a grudge. If it 'd been your gran'fer as 'ad done it, I shouldn't ha' been surprised, but it's lively games for a giglot' (young girl).

As Pike walked alongside of Esther he turned his eyes out of their corners to observe her. She strode along the lane with light tread, upright as a wand, easy in every movement, her head erect, covered with its dense cloud of shining hair.

A sense of compunction came over him. This handsome girl—was he to be the means of bringing her to her death? He would not have liked to ride a well-formed colt so as to break its wind or throw it down and cut its knees, and he did not relish the thought of having a hand in the destruction of so splendid a girl.

'I say, Esther,' he began, 'I don't care to ha' naught to do wi't.'

'Wi' what, maister?'

'Why, sure enough, wi' your being hanged. I don't say but wi' the agravation, Physic desarved it all, and that I wouldn't 'a done the like myself in a like agravation, but I'm not over-pleased to put my fingers into the matter.'

'It won't hurt y'.'

'No—it won't hurt me. But I don't care to have to appear against you, maiden, and mebbe say what may cause you to swing. I shu'dn't be easy after.'

'You needn't be afeared, Turnipike, they'll niver catch me. How can they? There's nobody knows the moor as I do. Why, if I ran out over Trewortha Marsh, could they follow? I reckon if they tried they'd be stopped. Or Crowdy Marsh nother—that's every bit and crumb as bad. And the rocks and stones o' Brown Willy and Rough Tor. Be there not scores on scores o' hiding-places there?'

'That's well enough, but you can't live on air.'

'Who'd tell tales o' me? Never you fear. Folks wouldn't let me starve when they knowed I were in hiding. I tell y' nigh to Rough Tor is a fogou' (cave)——

'Nay, not a word; I don't want to hear nothing about hiding-places. I wish you'd go and tell your tale about shooting thickey chap to some one else. I tell y' clean out, I won't know naught more about it, and here's good-bye according.'

He jumped on Physic's horse that he had been leading and galloped down the lane and out upon the road, where he dismounted and turned the cob adrift.

'I will go to Turnipike's missus for all that,' said Esther, and walked on. She had hardly reached the road before she met the rector, combing his whiskers, and blandly smiling at first one hedge and then the other, as though they were dissenters to be conciliated.

'Pars'n!' said Esther, striding up to him, 'can y' write now?'

'Write, my child, of course I can. Don't I write two sermons every week and three in Lent?'

'Will y' now come in wi' me to Betsy Pike's, and write out what I want to say?'

'Certainly, with the utmost alacrity. And what is it about?'

'About that ou'd Physic.'

'Physic! What about him?

'About the shutting of him.'

'Shutting—shutting, where has he been shut up?'

'He's a-shut through the heart, and dead as a want' (mole).

'Gracious me!'

The rector stood still, and his jaw dropped.

'I'd like y', pars'n, to take down all I've gotten to say about it. And there—there's the pistern as did it. Smell to it, her's got the smitch' (smell) 'o' powder about her still.'

'Merciful goodness!' Mr. Pamphlet remained motionless, gasping.

'And I want y' to put it all down on paper how it were a-done.'

'Shot—Mr. Physic shot! You wicked girl, you are making a joke—a miserable practical joke!'

'It's all right,' said Esther. 'Come wi' me if you doubt, and I'll show you where he lies at Tolmenna. What made he go for to drive gran'fer and us—me and my ou'd grammer out o' the house for, if he didn't expect a breakfast off lead? My grammer ill-wished him, and it's come to pass. Her said it would. Will y' now please come and put it all down in writing? And please tak' the pistern and give her to the perlice.'

'*I!*—I!—I!'

Mr. Pamphlet flushed the colour of a mulberry. 'I'll have nothing whatever to do with this. *I* mixed up in a police case like this! *I* have to appear in a court as witness, and be cross-questioned; it might interfere with my prospects—I mean my ministerial efficacy. I'll have nothing to do with it. Don't touch me! Don't let me see that horrible pistol! Go away! go away! Gracious! go away! Don't come near me—don't stop me!' and the Revd. Mr. Rector walked, almost ran, to escape the girl.

Esther stood irresolute for a few moments, looking after him, when she heard a sharp peremptory voice demand, 'What is the matter?'

She turned and saw Jane Curgenven leading Physic's cob. That good lady had been paying a parochial visit to the Turnipikes, to administer advice, reprimand, and a tract, and her father had promised to walk along the road and meet her as she returned. On leaving the cottage of the Pikes, Jane had found the agent's cob cropping the grass by the roadside, and had arrested it by the bridle, and was leading the animal. She concluded that the agent had hitched his beast up outside a farm or cottage whilst he entered on business, and that it had broken away. She would lead the cob to Curgenven, and then Physic could have it from the stables when he came for it.

'What is the matter?' asked Jane, surprised to see her father careering along the road at so exceptional a rate, so inconsistent with his rectorial dignity.

'Pars'n is right curious,' said Esther. 'I told 'n somethin', and I axed 'n somethin', and it made 'n run like a mazed hare.'

'What was it?'

'It were naught but I told 'n as Lawyer Physic were dead. He be shut through the heart, and I axed 'n to take the pistern and write down what I had to say.'

'Physic dead?'

'Ees. Folks mostly be when they's shut. That's the reason why his cob be a-runnin' loose.'

'Come with me this instant,' said Jane Curgenven. 'Come with me this instant, you abominable girl. Come with me to Mrs. Pike's house. I'll have this cleared up at once, and I'll lock you up there in the coal-hole, till I can send for the police to have you taken to prison.'

'No—not that,' said Esther, with a contemptuous shrug of her shoulders and toss of her glowing head of hair. 'I'll not be took and pinned i' a gaol, not I. But there—take the pistern. Thickey's the chap as did it. Her as shut 'n ain't such a terrible distance off. If you like to say 'twere I, you're welcome. None else were near. That's why I come here, and axed pars'n to take it all down. Now you know about it. There's the pistern, and you can tell the perlice, but take me they shan't.'

She put the pistol into Jane Curgenven's hand, turned, ran up the lane towards the moor, and was lost.

Jane Curgenven with promptitude faced about, and still leading Physic's cob went back to the cottage she had left recently. There she halted at the door, and called out the two eldest children, Tom and Jesse.

'Tom,' said she, 'jump into the saddle, and ride as hard as you can gallop for the police, and here's sixpence for your pains.' Then to herself, 'I must see that Esther be caught and brought to the gallows.'

'Jesse,' said she, 'go as fast as you can toddle for the doctor, and here is twopence for your trouble.' Then to herself, 'I must see what can be done for Physic, before it be too late.'

CHAPTER XLV.

CHEATED.

Never within the memory of man was such commotion caused in Curgenven as by the tidings that rapidly spread relative to the murder of Physic, the agent—no, not even by the suicide of Captain Lambert. The latter was a death leading to no very serious consequences, or no more serious consequences than a shift in the squireship. The present death entailed as a corollary a capital trial, and 'some one to swing for it,' as it was expressed. Who that some one was hardly anybody doubted; and it added to the zest of the excitement that this somebody was a female, and one whom all had regarded with suspicion, if not with disgust. The school-master had something to say about it, and to show how it all came of Esther not having reached the second standard. The Scripture reader had something to say about it, and to put it down to her having boiled her kettle with his 'Are you converted?'—a tract he had specially commended to her. The mission woman had something to say about it. She attributed the crime to Esther's not having been confirmed.

The women of Curgenven village ran in and out of each other's houses, talking over what had taken place. No woman was to be found in her own dwelling; every one had entertained mistrust of Esther; every one had expected that the turning of the Moridegs out of Tolmenna would bring bad luck on the head of Lawyer Physic.

The men congregated after work-hours in the public-house or coffee-tavern, and concurred in their view that it served Physic right; that they did not pity him, yet that nevertheless they could not cordially approve of the method adopted for ridding the estate and neighbourhood of him.

The children in the school could neither do an addition sum rightly nor spell a sentence correctly, the day following the death of Physic. The farmers could get no work done on their farms. The labourers were engaged in discussing the event, not on driving their ploughs.

All day long a train of pilgrims visited the scene of the murder; and all who visited the spot brought away with them some memento of the crime—a blade of grass on which the dead man had lain, a bit of moss stained with blood, a smoked wad from the pistol, a chip off the block of stone against which his head had rested. In mediæval times people greedily collected relics of martyrs, now-a-days they gather relics of murderers or the murdered with equal greed. The gardeners of Curgenven Hall congregated in the potting-shed and let the fire go out in the furnace that warmed the conservatories. The coachman and grooms sat over the fire in the saddle-room, smoking, and sent into the house for cider, over which to argue relative to the chances of Esther being caught. In the dairy the milk was burnt when the cream was being scalded, and the pigs in the sty went that day without their bucket of wash; but the fowls had a double feed of Indian corn, hastily thrown them by the maid without stopping to measure the proper allowance. In the kitchen the soup was allowed to boil over and perfume the whole house with its savour on the red-hot stove-plate, and the butler sent out a silver egg-spoon and a dessert fork for the kitchen-maid to empty down the sink. No one in all Curgenven could think of anything but the murder, and every one expressed an opinion thereon save two people—the rector, who reserved his, and Theresa, who was not, at her husband's insistence, told of it.

It was known that the police constable had been summoned by Mrs. Curgenven the elder, that she had stated to him how that Esther Morideg had confessed to her the murder of Mr. Physic, and had given her the pistol with which the murder was committed. It was further known that the constable had viewed the body, along with the surgeon, and found life extinct, and that he had gone off at once to endeavour to arrest Esther in the temporary habitation occupied by her grandparents; that he had failed to find her there, or to obtain any information as to her whereabouts from the old people; that accordingly he had returned to Curgenven, where he had demanded a warrant from Mr. Percival Curgenven, who was a magistrate; and that, armed with this warrant, he had departed for Liskeard to consult the head of the police.

The footman from the Hall was suddenly elevated to being the hero of the day, for he could tell how he had seen Esther Morideg fire out of the window of the bungalow, and how she had asked him to stand that she might have a shot at him, and how she had then and there declared her intention to take the life of Mr. Physic, to which threat he, John Thomas, had not paid much attention at the time, thinking it mere bravado; and he had overheard expressions of anger made use of by the girl at having been dispossessed of the house at Tolmenna, but which now he was ready to swear to before the judges, and stand to. The butler, not to be behind, declared how that he was the last person who had seen Mr. Physic alive, as he had called at the house to inquire after 'Missus.' That cannot have been more than half-an-hour before he was shot.

Then Pike, the horsebreaker, finding that John Thomas was the lion of the day, put in his claim to be a lion also in a degree still higher. He had seen Esther Morideg immediately after the murder walking with the pistol in her hand, and smelling of gunpowder down to her toes. And Esther had told him how that Lawyer Physic were shot. 'But,' said Pike, with a qualm of pity for the girl, 'he would swear before the most intelligent jury, and the oldest and venerablest judge in England, that she said it was pure accident; that is to say, Lawyer Physic had been impertinent to her, and in self-defence she'd done it.'

'Ah!' said some of the women, 'he was a cruel impident piece o' goods.'

'Ise sure,' said a very ugly old spinster, 'he made eyes at me oft enough as though he'd eat me; and what he'd 'a said had I give he the chance the Lord knows.'

But the view that Physic had been killed by accident or by Esther in self-defence did not find general favour. It was not to be denied that the Moridegs had been given the utmost provocation; that the old man had threatened 'to do' for the agent; that he had already been in prison for having attacked him; and it was argued that as the girl had gloried in her grandfather's act, she had endeavoured to outdo it. Then the story rapidly evolved myth about it. Some one had said that Physic had been killed, not by a bullet from a pistol, but by a slug from the old moor-man's gun. This having been partly overheard, was seized on by the person who half-heard it, and who, being desirous of heightening the tragedy, declared he had heard that when found Physic was half eaten by slugs, that had worked their way into his heart and liver. Whereupon the blacksmith, who set up to be an original thinker and an agnostic, said the whole story was false, no murder had been committed, but the agent had died of a sluggish liver. Some youths who were wont to hang about the forge, or who affected to be free-thinkers, though actually incapable of thinking either freely or in bands, adopted the blacksmith's view, and said that they did not believe in the pistol, and that Esther was an uncommonly handsome girl, and there was no harm in her. It was naught but jealousy and spite accusing her of a crime that had not been committed. Thereupon all the elderly, ugly, and married women, and all the pretty young and unmarried women as well, ran together as drops of mercury and coalesced in one body of opinion, that certainly Esther was guilty, that she was vicious by nature, of a malignant humour, capable of any crime, and entirely devoid of good looks, as she was of Christianity. Finally, the whole population of Curgenven was broken up into factions, one holding that Esther had shot the agent, another that he had been shot by the grandfather, a third that he had not been shot at all, but had died suddenly of a sluggish liver, or something like it, somehow connected with slugs.

Theresa had returned home in a condition of mental numbness, dominated by terror, not for herself. She did not consider the danger to which she was exposed, she was conscious only of the fact that she had taken a life—that a man who lived, and thought, and schemed, and in his fashion enjoyed himself, had by her act been thrust out of this world through the veil into the unseen.

She had never intended this, never thought of violently sweeping the man who tormented her from her path. She had hoped to frighten him; the rector had suggested that she should do this. She did not know that the pistol was loaded. It had not occurred to her to essay whether it were or not. She had not loaded it herself, and she was too bewildered to be able to consider how it was that it came to be charged with powder and shot, and provided with a cap.

She could see before her everywhere those upturned boot-soles with their patches, one patched across the front, the other half-heeled. Physic trod down his right boot on the inside, and was continually obliged to have pieces put on to rectify the abrasions. In this new portion the nails were bright and of brass, the nails did not show in the older portion of the sole. If Theresa looked at a picture, the soles stood between her and it, and behind the soles was a black shapeless shadow. If she looked at her bed, the soles were there, thrust out from under the valance; out of the window—they were between her and the landscape. Moreover the scent of the powder followed her. The flowers on her table, the geraniums on the stairs, all exhaled a savour of exploded gunpowder.

Her maid came up with the tray, and beef-tea and toast. The beef-tea steamed like powder, the toast tasted of it. Theresa turned her head aside, she could not endure the food.

Hours passed, the night closed in. She sat looking into the fire, and seeing soles in the coals thrust out between the bars, then disappearing, and fresh boot-soles appearing. She became restless, feverish with impatience when none were distinguishable, waiting, expecting till they re-appeared somewhere among the coals or among the flames.

Then Mr. Curgenven arrived. He had been summoned from the shooting partly to sign a warrant to enable the police to arrest Esther Morideg, suspected of having caused the death of Mr. Physic. He had listened to the story, had done what was required of him, and then gave orders to the servants to maintain silence on the matter before their mistress, whose health would not suffer her to be agitated.

He came up-stairs to see her, to kiss her, take her hand, and feel whether it were cold or feverish, and inquire how she was. He was shocked and alarmed at her appearance, the stony look of her face, the sunken eyes, the bloodless lips. Never before had she failed to respond to his tenderness, to smile when he came in, and address him with pleasant words of welcome. But now she seemed hardly to see him, the muscles of her face were set as though they would never relax, and her tongue was tied so that she could not speak.

He was concerned. Instead of being better than when he left her, she was markedly worse. He determined to send for the doctor, and urged her at once to go to bed.

She listlessly assented, and, when he had left and sent up her maid, allowed herself to be undressed. But on the servant beginning to remove Theresa's gown, there fell from her breast the long envelope that contained the will. She had forgotten it till that moment. The maid, by stooping to pick it up, attracted her attention ; animation was restored, and snatching the envelope from the girl's hands, she said, 'Leave me! Leave me for ten minutes. I do not want you,' and stood trembling and watching till the maid had closed the door behind her.

The fixity in which her faculties had been sealed was gone, exchanged for a flutter of conflicting emotions. She thought now of the will, no more of that ghastly spectacle of upturned boot-soles on the moor. She had the will—she had that very document for which she had risked so much ; and now, with the fire burning in the grate, it was in her power to destroy it, and put an end for ever to the anxiety and threat of trouble this hateful document carried with it.

She hastily tore open the envelope, walked to the dressing-table, where two candles were burning beside the looking-glass, and spread the will out upon the mirror, that she might satisfy her eyes that she really did have in her power the coveted document. She read it through in feverish haste. As she read she recalled every word. It was the same that she had seen at Physic's office, and yet——

She dropped one hand that was holding the paper, and in so doing struck over one of the candles, that fell, and was broken and extinguished on the carpet. She did not notice this, she caught the paper up and held it to the other candle, and looked at the signatures. The paper was not the same.

No, it was not the same. She had been cheated. Physic had passed off on her a copy. On the original was a seal. Lambert had not only signed his name, but after signing it, he had sealed it, out of some fancy that to seal as well as to sign was necessary to give force to such a deed. He had sealed it with his signet that bore the Curgenven crest. On this there was no seal, nothing but the signatures copied. It was a transcript. A scalding rush of blood poured through the veins of Theresa. After all, Physic had meant to deceive her, to sell her a worthless copy, and retain in his hands the original wherewith still to threaten her.

Every particle of remorse or regret for having caused his death, every atom of pity for the man, died out of her soul, never again to revive. He had brought her that copy with protests of straight dealing, and he had met with his desert.

But a second thought now swelled up in her mind, taking from her breath, and sight, and hearing.

Where was the jewel-case?

She had put it into Physic's hands, and then had endeavoured by a threat to recover it from him. The pistol had been discharged, he had fallen; and in that moment of supreme horror she had forgotten wholly the existence of the case, and that it had been left in his hands.

A sickening terror oppressed her. That case would be found with the dead man, and through it the truth must come out.

How could the truth be concealed? That jewel-case would be recognized, and it would be known that she, and she only, had been in possession of it. The conclusion certain to be reached was that she had had something to do with Physic either immediately before, or at the very moment of his death. How else could his having the Curgenven jewel-case and the presence of the Curgenven pistol be accounted for? Suspicion must inevitably fall on her—and then!—and then!

The copy of the will was worthless. She threw it into the fire, and when it was consumed, cast herself on the bed and covered her eyes with her hands: not to sleep for one quarter of an hour all that long night; not to toss from side to side, but to lie in one position, with her hands over her burning eyes, thinking, but never reaching any solution that could give her rest.

CHAPTER XLVI.

IN THE SMOKE.

Roger Morideg and his wife were seated in the shed converted temporarily into a habitation; a fire was burning in the middle, a fire of skin turf, and the smoke found its way out as best it might through the thatch, so that from without the hovel had the appearance of a steaming dunghill. To ordinary eyes and lungs the atmosphere within would have been unendurable, but it did not affect either sensibly. Old Roger was adding to the fume by smoking his broken black pipe, and his wife Tamsin was swinging herself whilst knitting, and singing a ballad:

'There was a woman, and a widow was she,
The red, the green, and the yellow!
A daughter she had as the elm tree,[1]
Oh! the flowers that bloom in the valley!'

Then the old man withdrew his pipe from his mouth and joined in the chorus, taking a third below the melody:

'The harp, the lute, the fife, the flute, and the cymbal,
Sweet goes the treble violin,
Oh! the flowers that bloom in the valley!'

The knitter continued:

'There came a knight all clothed in red,
The red, the green, and the yellow!
Oh, and will you be——'

when the door was thrown open and Esther came in.

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[1] The Cornish elm, that grows as a poplar or a pine, small leafed.

'Now,' said she, 'give kimbly.[1] I've news.'

'What be it? No kimbly till I knaws what the news be.'

'Physic is dead—lyin' dead to Tolmenna, and volks do say as I've a shut 'n!'

'How can that be?' asked Roger, turning to where his gun usually hung, but, owing to the smoke, being unable to see it, he put forth his hand and felt it. 'Aye! here her be. I reckon you can't shut wi'out the instrument to do't wi'.'

''Tis true,' said Esther, 'Physic be lyin' dead, however it be he's a-gotten his death. But this I know, volks 'll put it on me.'

'That's like enough,' said Roger. 'There's reason there.'

'And I must be off and hide, or I'll be ta'en and put i' the clink where you was, gran'fer, and not get out so soon and so peart as you.'

'Folks 'll put it on us, for sartain sure,' said Tamsin, 'as you, Roger, bear 'n a malice, and I 'a ill-wished 'n. Us 'a said us wished the lawyer-chap dead, and they'll say us killed 'n. It's as true that as fingers be fingers and not toes.'

'It's me, gran'fer, as they'll be after, and I must just run for't. I know very well where I'll go, but I shall want a thing or two, so as——'

'And where's that?'

'I wi'n't tell,' answered Esther. 'Then you can say you dun' know. It's waste o' good words telling lies, and there's no pleasure in it where there's no cause.'

'But how did Lawyer Physic come to die?' asked Roger.

'I'll tell y' what he looks like now, gran'fer,' said Esther. 'But if you ask me how he come to look like this, why, I wi'n't say, not but that I could if I would.'

After she had given a vigorous and graphic account of the condition of the corpse, Roger shook his head.

'You didn't do it wi' a moorstone, that's sartain, nor wi' my gun, for there she be. But lor-a-mussy, what matters how he cam' by his dose o' lead so long as he got it! and no one can't say but sarves him right.'

'And they be after me. They've made up their minds I 'a done it, and I wi'n't be caught and locked up i' Bodmin goal not if I knaws it, I'll run first. So now give me what I want.'

'And what doest a-want?'

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[1] A handsel for good news.

'I want a reapin'-hook, and a blanket, and loaf o' bread—that's all.'

'I don't see why you need go,' said Tamsin. ''Tes gran'fer and I hev been most for'ard wi' our words agin' Lawyer Physic, and not you, Esther.'

'Why, if I run, they'll say for sure it be I and not you, and leave you old volks quiet.'

'There's something in that.'

'And second,' said Esther, 'if I didn't do it mysel', why I seed it done, and by a very good friend as I doan't want to hev to send to the gallows; and it's just this, no lies 'd do in this case, else I'd tell them by the scores, and look as simple as any noggy. But they wi'n't do, more's the pity. There's nothin' for't but I must run.'

'There's no hurry,' said the old woman. 'There's no reason to be i' such a tarve. Set you down. You mun eat fust, afore you can run the country, and I've got the taties on the boil now.'

'I don't wish to be ketched here,' said Esther.

'There's no need you should,' answered her grandmother. 'Punch 'll mind the door, and bark if any one comes nigh. Then in the dimmits' (twilight) 'you can go.'

Esther allowed herself to be persuaded. Tamsin proceeded to turn the potatoes into a large earthen bowl; with them were lumps of bacon.

'There now,' she said, 'don't scald your fingers; help yourselves as you likes.'

'I wonder now,' observed the old man, 'who'll get the Tolmenna property? Lawyer Physic warn't married and had no childer, and I never heard as he had kin.'

'Then us may go back agin to the ou'd place,' said Tamsin. 'That'll be brave. But 't 'll be cruel hard work buildin' of her up again.'

'I'd like to know who'd done it,' said the old fellow, shaking his head. ''Tes curious. But I didn't reckon there was any other but myself had the face to do it. And I didn't do it for sure sartain, as I wor sittin' here and singin'. And Esther couldn't 'a done it, best wishes ain't firearms. If it 'ud been a knack wi' a stone, her was ekal to that, but to shut 'n,' he shook his head again, 'her ain't up to them May games.'

Roger leisurely peeled a potato, set it on his knee, and before eating said, 'Why, now, shu'dn't us make it out a case o' phillideecee? then there's no trouble to nobody. Ou'd mother there and I can 'a heerd 'n say he was going to do it, and were zick o' life, and cruel uneasy in conscience; and you, Esther, can 'a seed 'n shut hisself, and there we be—no bother to nobody, and satisfactory to every one consarned. Ees, I reckon that'll do it. Wheer now, Esther, did he get the gun? Was he out after woodcock? No, that won't come fitty. You sez 'twere done wi' a bullet. Never mind. Gi'e me five minutes, and I'll shape it out—killed hisself, not right in his head, had terrible headaches, and conscience worser.'

'Hist!' said Tamsin.

The dog was barking outside furiously.

'Quick!' said the old woman, as she flung wet heather on the fire, 'you throw yourself down in the farran' (fern), 'and I'll cover you up.'

No sooner said than done; Esther crept behind her grandmother, who at once piled fern, and sticks, and skin turf[1] over her.

The fire poured forth volumes of pungent white smoke that filled the hovel and rolled forth at the door; so dense was it, that the policeman coming up outside, when he looked in could see nothing; his eyes ran with water, and he coughed as the smoke entered his lungs.

Mrs. Morideg was rocking herself and knitting, droning her song:

'There came a knight all clothed in red,
  The red, the green, and the yellow!
"And will you be my bride?" he said,
  Oh! the flowers that bloom in the valley!'

And Roger threw in his part lustily:

'The harp, the lute, the fife, the flute, and the cymbal,
  Sweet goes the treble violin,
Oh! the flowers that bloom in the valley!'

The old woman continued:

'There came a second all clothed in green,
  The red, the green, and the yellow!
And he said, "My fair, will you be my queen?"
  Oh! the flowers——'

'Come out! come out, you bedlam hag!' shouted the policeman. 'I'm no more a knight all clothed in green than you are a fair maid.'

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[1] Of turf on the Cornish moors there are two kinds, the peat turf, dug in the bogs, and the skin turf, a spade-graft off the surface of the moor anywhere taken where not stony.

'Lor-a-mussy!' exclaimed Roger. 'To think now, it's our good friend Mr. Tregaskis. And it's main glad I be to see you. Step in and hev a pertatie. There be one ready peeled a-coolin' on my knee, and I've a brave bit o' vat bacon atween my fingers. Come now, don't y' be feared that my old 'ooman 'll cast her eye over y', there be such a pother o' smoke I doubt if that you can see her. Come in, and be hearty welcome now. And if you'll stop, I'll see if I can't find a drop o' sperit to comfort y'.'

'I cannot stay—what a confounded smoke! Where is your daughter Esther?'

'O Lor'!' said Mrs. Morideg, 'doan't y' go a-rippin' up ou'd wounds, Mister Tregaskis. Her's in heavenly glory—eighteen year last Curgenven feast.'

Then she broke out into a song sung through the long length and narrow breadth of Cornwall, and more familiar than 'God save the Queen':

'Don't you zee my Billy comin',
Zittin' on a gou'den cloud?
Gardin' angels zingin' round 'n,
Wrappéd in a goary shroud.'

Then Roger roared out the chorus in bass to the shrill pipe of Tamsin's treble:

'Billy is the lad I do adore,
Billy is my darlin'.
Billy is a-dyin'.
Oh! I fear I shall never zee 'n more!'

'Always meanin',' threw in Mrs. Morideg, 'my poor daughter Esther as a-died, and be now i' glory! Praises, oh! it's groanin' matter, sure. Roger, groan there now, can't y'?' And both old folks began to groan as at a Revival meeting, and rock themselves as they did so.

'Oh, darn that tatie!' exclaimed Roger. 'Her's trummled off my knee.'

'I do not mean your daughter; I mean that girl, your grandchild,' said the sergeant angrily.

'Ah! now why didn't y' say so, mister? Come in like a friend and sit down, thickey pertatie be gettin' deadly cold, saving where my knee 'a put a little warmth into her. Dear, dear life! now I be main sorry the pertatie be so dirty. Her tum'led on the ground, and my ou'd wife—dirty ou'd toad—han't swept 'n up fitty this mornin'.'

'Where is the girl? I cannot come in, I should be stifled. Can't you throw some of the stuff off the fire?'

Why, Lor', Mister Tregaskis, us'd set the whole place a-fire if us scattered the trade[1] about; and it 'ud make such a gashly smoke, ye could eat 'n like figgy pudding.'

'Is Esther Morideg within?'

'Esther, Lor', Mister Tregaskis, whativer be you a-thinkin' of? Her's been gone five or six hours. Her went to Dosmare Pool a flint-pickin'.'

'Flint-picking?'

'Aye so, I reckon. Them larned folks to Truro be wun'erful curious about the flints us picks up—and there's a sight on 'em to be gotten to Dosmare, and her picks up a bit o' money that way, and it's as good a way as yourn nor mine, I s'pose.'

'That's false. She has not been to Dosmare. She has been to Tolmenna.'

'Has she though? I'll smack her when her comes home for telling of lies. Her said her was going, but us bain't birds o' the air to fly overhead and see whereabouts her goes. There's one thing I be sure of, her's not runnin' the country after young men, as some maids does I could name.'

'I know nothing about that,' retorted the policeman. 'What I want to know is—that Esther is not here.'

'I've told y' so.'

'Yes, but that does not satisfy me.'

'Well, then, come in and look round for yourself.'

'I can't bear the smoke.'

'There, now, and I couldn't a-bear to be laced up in them tight clothes as you be; it all comes o' edication. I think nothin' o' the smoke; nor will you if you come in, and sit here and eat the pertaties. In ten minutes you'll be right enough.'

The policeman stepped within, coughing and blinking.

'I'll try to get up a flame,' said Tamsin, throwing on a furze-bush that did indeed blaze up and fill the hovel with light; in the dense smoke, however, little could be distinguished.

'The pertatie is waitin' for y',' said Roger. 'Look at 'n settin' on my knee and axin' to be eaten.'

'I want none of your potatoes,' replied the policeman, irritated by the smoke. 'I will satisfy myself the girl is not within.'

'Shall I make more blaze, Mister Tregaskis?' asked Tamsin.

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[1] 'Trade' means any sort of material, earth, stones, turf, brushwood—in fact anything.

'I don't think it helps much. Where is your gun?'

'Here,' answered Roger with alacrity. 'I haven't used 'n for half an age. Smell to his mouth; it be sweet as the breath o' a baby.'

He handed the old gun through the smoke to the policeman, who took it outside, and applied his nose to the barrel, and looked at the lock with watery eyes, then passed it back again. Mrs. Morideg began to knit, rock herself, and sing:

'The moon doth shine so bright in the sky,
The red, the green, and the yellow!
"Come out, come out!" did the green knight cry,
Oh! the flowers that bloom in the valley!'

And she and old Roger, at the top of their voices, with something of triumph and mockery in the tone, roared the chorus:

'The harp, the lute, the fife, the flute, and the cymbal,
Sweet goes the treble violin——'

'Be silent, will you?' shouted the policeman, nettled at his want of success, altogether beaten by the fumes of the fire. 'I'll tell you what, you howling savage, I'll tear a hole in the roof, and let this darned smoke out, and then I'll be able to ransack the whole piggery!'

'Oh, my dear!' exclaimed Mrs. Morideg, 'that'll never do. What will Farmer Hext say to that up to Trewortha? This bain't no house o' ourn; her's but lent to we. He'll hev the law on you, sure as you'rn a real perliceman, that he will.'

'Then I'll come in and grope into every corner. I believe Esther is here.'

'And what be you a-come after my Esther for?' asked Tamsin. 'I know you've had a soort of a fancy for she. Is it honourable, and you be courtin' of she? Why, I always heard say as you was a respectable chap. So if you means it honourable, come along.'

'It's nothing of the sort,' said the policeman. 'Come, turn out of this house, and let me in; I'll soon have done with the fire and smoke, and let some daylight into the place.'

'Not so, mister!' replied Roger; 'I'm not to be turned out o' this house as I was from t'other. Show me your warrant first, I say.'

With this the policeman was not then provided. He had come on at once in quest of Esther, denounced as the murderess by Mrs. Curgenven. He knew enough of the extent of his power, and that he might get into trouble if he went beyond it.

He stood outside for a moment or two, racking his brain to discover what was best to be done, whilst the dog Punch snarled and barked round him, and made a rush at his calves whenever he attempted to enter the hovel. Then ensued a fresh glare within, accompanied by a dense outpour of smoke. The old woman had heaped fresh fuel on the fire.

It was not possible for civilized lungs and eyes to endure the fume, and he turned to leave, in ill-humour with himself, and especially with the Moridegs. But he had not taken half-a-dozen steps from the door before he was rapped on the shoulders by the gun-barrel, and turning sharply, saw Esther, who had sprung through the door and held her grandfather's fowling-piece.

'Ah! I knew you were there. Now I'll arrest you. I arrest you in the Queen's name on a charge of murder.'

'No—you do not touch me,' said Esther. 'Come a-courtin' o' me, is it? Why, Tregaskis, you're the first man as has. And I tell y' what, you mun ketch me afore you can call me yourn. Give me the start, and let us run.'

'In the Queen's name, I arrest you,' said the policeman, stepping towards her.

'Nay! you'll not catch me that road,' said Esther, with a laugh. 'Us'll have rare games, us will. Tip and run. See, Tregaskis!' She brought the muzzle of the barrel down on his shoulder, and then flung the fowling-piece away. 'There, I'm off; tip and run. Ketch me if you can!'

And like a fawn she leaped a bank and went as a fawn bounding over the moor. Tregaskis shook his head. He could not follow, or were he to follow, it would not be with the smallest prospect of catching the girl.

CHAPTER XLVII.

BROWN WILLY.

Esther fastened two ends of the blanket—a thin one—round her neck, wearing it as a mantle, tucked another end under one arm where she carried the loaf, and started, a reaping-hook in her right hand, bound by the handle to a long stick, on her way north-west.

She passed the stream that flows into the Trewortha Marsh from the west, and climbed the round hill above it, in the midst of which is an outcrop of sparry granite that bears a fanciful resemblance to a grey mare, and which accordingly bears this name. Esther had arranged with her grandparents that food and sundry articles she might need were to be left for her at intervals among the rocks of the Grey Mare; then she went over a long down sparsely strewn with granite, much skinned accordingly for turf, and away to where, like a white ribbon, the great Bodmin road, the main line of communication in former days between London and Falmouth, crossed hill and dipped into dale in the undulating surface of the moor between the main groups of mountainous outcrops of granite. Here were a few farms clustered about the road, with their enclosures taken from the waste built round with the stones cleared from the ground within.

To the north, in the gathering gloom, but with some of the western halo from the set sun reflected over their barren crests, rose ridge on ridge against the dark north-eastern sky. Already, under the granite-crowned Garrah, a star shone forth, where in a solitary farm a lamp had been kindled.

Esther crossed the Bodmin road without encountering any one, and plunged into the wilderness beyond, a wilderness not to be trodden and threaded by daylight by such as are inexperienced and unacquainted with the country, on account of the wide expanses of unfathomed bog occupying old lake basins.

Esther was well aware of the danger, but she knew her direction, knew that the moon was near full and would shortly rise over the ridge to the east; and she was also well acquainted with the position of the dangerous morasses, and of the points where the streams could be crossed, none deep so near their cradle.

Like a dark purpose in a sullen, tortuous mind, the river Fowey wormed its way through the moors. Never seen, hardly heard in its whispering falls, it could not be gathered where it worked and turned, and dived and fretted. Esther kept to the heights, now traversing whole villages of ancient circular huts, some within pounds and fortifications, some outside, at what date tenanted none knew. Now and then she startled a couched moor colt or a heifer, or a frightened curlew with a whirr and scream rose from under her feet. Then she made Tolborough, with its cairn crowning the summit, a chambered cairn with a passage leading into its depths, where dwelt the pixies.

She passed without fear, the Good People had never hurt her. She belonged to them; they would protect her when taking refuge in their domain, their last refuge from the encroaching plough and the sound of church bells. Here she turned and looked back. Darkness had gathered behind her as a misty sable sea flowing in between all the mountain tops to the east, pouring down into the bottoms and filling them with gloom, whilst, silvery and ghostlike, their granite heads still caught the light. But out of this dark shadow she saw Dosmare like a large eye looking up at the night heavens, waiting to see the moon sail above it and to reflect it in its waveless surface; Dosmare, the sole remaining lake of the cluster that once occupied the basins in this upland region. On again, now warily picking her way among the rocks of Coddah and down into the great basin below Brown Willy, where springs rise and the 'old men' had burrowed after tin, and bogs have swelled and overflowed and occupied the ancient works.

A horrible death-like odour rose from the bogs, an odour as of an overcrowded graveyard; and graveyards these vast bogs are, that have swallowed and contain in their abysses the bones of departed races of beasts that once ranged the moors, and relics of ancient peoples who worked there, and who have disappeared like the elk and urochs, the wolf and hyæna.

Before Esther, against the northern sky, stood the black mass of the highest of the Cornish ridges, like a mighty wave rolling in on her to submerge her in the trough below. She seated herself on a stone and waited. She dared not go forward into that same trough till light came. As she sat, she was as one in a lost, untenanted world. Not a sound of any living being, of a bird, or insect was audible. The outline of the mountain before her was undefined—whether on account of gathering vapour from the Atlantic or in night shadows she could not tell. And now, sitting there in the chill air, in absolute solitude, she begins in her undisciplined mind to ask herself why she was there.

Why, indeed, had she run away, and was hiding, when she had done no harm to any one?

She had acted on impulse, the first impulse of a warm heart. Few there were who had been kind to her, but among those few was Theresa Curgenven. She had wits enough to know that what Theresa had done might bring her to a shameful death, a death that would heap disgrace on the family to which belonged Justinian and Alice, the only persons she loved outside her grandparents' hovel. But that was not all. She, and she alone, had seen Physic shot. And although with her lack of moral education she had no scruples about speaking and even swearing to what was not the truth, she was afraid lest if brought to cross-examination by 'them lawyer chaps,' the truth might be extorted from her.

The idea of taking the crime on herself had sprung up unprompted in her rude mind as the readiest way of relieving Theresa. She was confident that she could elude pursuit on her native moors. A regiment of soldiers could not catch her—she had a thousand lurking-places. She knew that not a moor farmer or his men would 'turn cat-in-the-pan' on her, in other words, betray her whereabouts, should they guess or come to know it, not only because they would dread the vengeance of her grandmother, but because they regarded her as belonging to themselves, the moor-folk, in contradistinction to the lowland people. And, as she sat musing, she laughed merrily and beat her hands together. There was sport in leading the police a wild-goose chase, in drawing them off on a false scent. She had not, as a child, played games with the school-children; now, on the confines of womanhood, she would play such a May game as was unsurpassed and unsurpassable; and so, with this game, take farewell of childhood. She had laughed aloud. There was no echo, not the smallest reverberation, her voice went forth into and was lost in space.

But now there was a brightening in the eastern sky, and first a spark, then a flame, then a globe of fire rose above the moors, and a flood of light was poured over the flank of Brown Willy. Not over its five heads, for the crest had, in fact, arrested fog from the Atlantic that blew over it, blew between the points of its comb, arched over the great trough below, which was suffused with silver moonlight, and the vapour above was itself turned into light like the silken streamers of the cotton-grass in the marsh.

With a shout of exultation, Esther sprang to her feet, and the full moon flashed from her reaping-hook, turning it into a silver crescent.

Down the slope of Coddah Esther went, her feet bounding on the wet turf; she saw the flash of water in Fowey Well, a pool where the river bearing that name is supposed to rise. She almost ran down, for she was chilled with sitting in the cold night air and falling dew, and having reached the bottom crossed it, and began to climb the side of Brown Willy. As she ascended, the silvery streamers of fog were dispersed, and the five-horned head of the mountain stood out illuminated by the moon, turned into silver against the night sky. A steep scramble, and then at length, now glowing in every limb, the girl stood on the summit of the most eastern point. Here rises an immense cairn above some ancient Cornish king. Here the dead man lies with a golden goblet in his hand, and he turns his cup from side to side. When he is thirsty, he turns the bowl to the west, and thereupon the wind blows from the ocean and brings up rain that pours through the chinks of his grave and fills the cup. The dead man holds it till full, and then drinks. If his tongue be slaked, he turns the bowl downward and the wind shifts, the clouds disperse, and the sun shines. But he has his thirsty fits full often, and when they are on him rain falls incessantly, and the fire that consumes him seems unquenchable.

'To-night,' laughed Esther, 'the ou'd king hev took but a dewdrop in his cup and gone to sleep again.' Then she descended the further side of the crest, and found what she had come to find, her place of shelter—a house ready built, but untenanted since the times of the old king of the golden cup, who lay immediately overhead.

This house is a beehive hut composed completely of granite blocks nestling in among the natural rocks, like a swallow's habitation; so like the natural rocks in colour and appearance, that probably ninety-nine persons out of a hundred might pass within a stone's throw of it without observing it. It is completely circular, six feet in diameter within, the walls are perfect, and stand above the paved floor but three feet; and then the roof is drawn together in overlapping courses, except where one huge slab has been thrust over a portion. The little doorway is to this day intact. The house could be entered on hands and knees alone, between granite jambs under a granite lintel. Attached to it is a still smaller beehive hut, that served anciently as store-chamber. The hut was indeed the mere skeleton, unvested in its original covering of turf that excluded wet and cold, but such as it was Esther was constrained to make it her habitation for the rest of the night.

She had been walking for some hours, and was hungry and tired. She broke off a piece of the loaf she carried and ate it for her supper, then, having wrapped herself up in the blanket, she laid herself in the driest recess of the hut and was soon asleep.

When morning broke she was shivering with cold. A hasty breakfast was made on her loaf, and then she set to work upon her house to make it rain and wind tight. This was not difficult. She cut up turf and stopped all the chinks between the stones; she cleared out all the peat and mould that had accumulated through some two thousand years on the floor; she reaped heather and strewed it on the pavement to form a bed, and then proceeded to weave rushes for a mat that she could hang over the entrance at night. Upon the roof she heaped turves that she found at the places where the peat-cutters had stacked their stores to dry, and had neglected or cast aside as indifferent slabs. The day was thus spent, occupying all her energies and intelligence, to the reduction of the size of the loaf.

A fire she dared not kindle, had she possessed the means of lighting one. She was living at the highest point in all Cornwall, at a point commanding two seas. Far away to the south was Plymouth Sound, and gleaming like an arm of fire in the declining sun; to the west was the estuary of the Camel, Padstow Bay. A light at such an elevation would be seen far and wide, and must attract attention. Only in rain and mist could she venture to kindle one; but, so far, rain and mist had happily not come upon her.

The day was over, and in her beehive hut in the darkness sat Esther, plaiting the rushes to complete her screen. The wind piped and fluttered about the entrance. A soft silvery-grey light was discernible at her narrow doorway. She sang to herself snatches of old ballads her grandmother had taught her; then laid her plaiting down in her lap, unable to proceed in the darkness, and listened to the play of the wind and to the tumble and roar of her own stormy pulses, and think as best she could the thoughts that flashed in her dark mind. They came one on another; now a thought of her grandparents, then of Justinian, next of how she was giving the police the slip, then of the murdered man, and not in order but in a whirl, and dancing over and flashing through them, fancies of the king with his golden cup; of Tregeagle, the giant, who churned Dosmare with his staff till it foamed like a cauldron; of the pixies dancing round the cairn on Tolborough.

Then, suddenly, she was startled by a scream, loud and piercing, in her ear, and a flutter near her feet.

She shrank against the stone at her back, drawing her feet under her in terror, and holding her breath.

Glimmering in the dark were a pair of eyes, now flashing, then disappearing like a revolving light at sea.

The moon rose, and a flood of pure light poured in at her doorway, and in that light she saw what had alarmed her, a snowy owl, white in itself, dazzling white in the moonbeam.

It had come to warn her to depart from a haunt it called its own.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ESTHER'S ADVOCATES.

Percival Curgenven, as both magistrate and employer of the deceased Mr. Physic, considered himself bound to take active measures to have the case of the murder cleared up, and the murderess brought to justice. Not that his activity was productive of result. He ran about talking, drove into Liskeard to consult a lawyer, discuss the matter with the superintendent of the police, dine at the ordinary at Webb's Hotel, and make the murder the subject of discussion at table; and after having laid strict injunctions on the servants and on Justinian not to mention the matter before his wife, lest it should excite and harm her, was himself the first to transgress, and blurt the whole matter out before her.

There had been a coroner's inquest, and, under the circumstances, with such evidence as was produced before the jury, the verdict was one of murder against Esther Morideg. But then, in this case, as in that of Captain Lambert, and ten thousand others, all the evidence necessary for the direction of coroner and jury into a right finding was not produced.

Justinian was in the smoking-room of the bungalow engaged in trying to get into working order a piece of Captain Lambert's mechanism, a tumbler made to go through numerous and varied evolutions by the fall of sand into buckets of different sizes, rendering the revolutions more or less irregular, and thus changing the attitudes of the tumbler. The toy had been neglected and had got out of order. He had removed the back of the box that contained the mechanism and was studying the contrivance, when a tap at the window-pane called off his attention, and he saw the sweet face of Alice looking in at him. He started up, and ran out to her, but met her in the doorway coming in.

'Alice, I have found out the secret of the little man who pirouettes,' said Justinian. 'See—this is how your father managed it. Was it not clever?'

'Oh, never mind that,' said the girl. 'I am so anxious and unhappy about Esther Morideg. I suppose you know that the coroner has given out that she shot Mr. Physic, and I am quite sure it is not true.'

'I *know* it is not true,' said Justinian.

'So do I; but why is all this hue-and-cry after her when she is innocent?'

'Because they will have it that she shot him. How do you know, Alice, that she is innocent?'

'I am sure of it. She couldn't do it. She is as good-hearted a girl as ever was found; wild and uneducated of course, but that does not make her wicked. She is not wicked. Justin, I am positive she never did it, because she could not do it.'

'I don't think your reasons convincing.'

'But I know her.'

'So do I. I don't believe she could do it, though the provocation was great.'

'I am quite positive she did not.'

'My reasons are better than yours, Alice. I know she is innocent for reasons that do carry conviction with them. You see, men and women have different sorts of intellects. You say she is innocent because you like her and think her a nice sort of a girl; I say so because I have evidence that exculpates her. That is the difference in sex.'

'What are your reasons?'

'Why, this—I know that the pistol was in its place when I came here for my gun. Look, Alice, there is the rack. There is my gun, and there is the governor's, and do you see that gap below? There is where the pistol was. You know we were at Sir Sampson's. My step-mother had a fit, or something of the sort, and a servant was sent to recall the governor and me. We came back, and I took the gov.'s gun and put that, as well as mine, here on the rack, and I am positive the pistol was in place. Then, as my step-mother was better, and wished us to go back to the Tregonticks', I came here for the guns again, and the pistol was still in its place. I remember noticing then that it had a cap on, but as the hammer was down, I couldn't say whether it was an old one or not, I was in too great a hurry to examine at the time. Those owls of police have got the pistol now, and so you see there is a gap in the rack. Well, when I came here for the guns, don't you think I should have at once noticed had the pistol been away? I don't know what girls are, whether they are observant or not, but all I can say is that men see these things at once with half an eye. The pistol was in place. I noticed the copper of the cap under the hammer, and determined I'd row the keeper about it, for he ought to have had the pistol cleaned. I could swear to it. And yet these fools have it that Esther carried it off a day or two ago, after having frightened John Thomas with a threat that she would pepper his fat calves with it. It's rubbish!'

'But—Justin! why have you not said this? Why did you not let the coroner and the jury know this?'

'I wasn't going to appear before a pack of idiots unless specially sent for. Why, Alice, who do you think they had for jury? There was Tonkin, the fellow who has that little omnium gatherum shop, boots and lollipops, groceries and drapery. There was Hicks, who is only a day labourer, and so deaf that he misunderstands everything said to him, and Uglow the butcher. Do you think I, the young squire, was going to come before a parcel of bumpkins and give evidence? Not I. If there should be a trial, and a respectable jury of educated and intelligent men, I'll go and say my say, but I'm not the man to cast pearls before swine.'

'Oh, Justin! you have done very wrong. Poor Esther is in trouble and danger, and all through you.'

'Not a bit. They are such a pack of stupids, that I knew they would bring in their verdict in defiance of my evidence, if I gave it; and I was not going to submit to that—I, the young squire, indeed! Besides, who is the coroner? He's only old Grimston, who is a second-class lawyer, and the son of an auctioneer, and married the daughter of the cake-shop. When there's a proper judge and respectable jury, then I'll say my say.'

'And in the meantime poor Esther is to be hunted and perhaps thrown into prison.'

'Oh! you let Esther take care of herself. What does she care about what old Grimston, and Uglow, and Hicks, and that lot decide concerning her? I wouldn't care a snap myself. Let them say I shot Physic. I should laugh in their faces. Why, Hicks is as stupid as he is deaf. Who cares for their opinion except their wives?'

'But your father thinks Esther is guilty.'

'Yes—it is unfortunate. He is rather—well, he is swayed too much by general opinion, which is what I despise. Indeed, I may say I am convinced that when general opinion sets one way, truth is to be found in the opposite direction.'

'Did you not tell your father about the pistol?'

'Yes, but he did not listen, or give what I said its proper weight. You see unfortunately I am only his son, and a father, I suppose, is always inclined to undervalue a son's opinion and intellect, and so on. Besides, he is rather obstinate, though I say it, and he has made up his mind that Esther killed Physic, and he will stick to his opinion as a matter of principle, just because he has formed his opinion. It is a misfortune when people do not listen to reason, but, after all, they are the sufferers.'

'Not in this case, Justin. It is poor Esther who is the sufferer. What is to be done about her?'

'I don't know.'

'But the truth cannot be arrived at till she is found.'

'Then let them find her.'

'No—do not let her be caught by the police and carried to gaol, and lie in prison, regarded as a murderess, till the assizes. It would kill her to be confined within stone walls.'

'There is something in that. And that is why she has given them the slip.'

'Yes, but where is she? I wish she could be seen and spoken with, then we would find out something about this. Now every one says she murdered Mr. Physic, and I don't believe it, and never shall be brought to believe it.'

'Nor will I,' said Justinian.

'Then it is our duty to stand by her, and help her to clear herself. Justin! she is a poor uneducated creature, and quite unable to establish her own innocence. Every one is against her except you and myself, and you and I must be her advocates, and do what we can to clear her.'

'I should enjoy doing it,' said Justinian, 'if only for the sake of letting the world know that our opinion is worth attending to. And it would teach the governor a salutary lesson, too.'

'Then do something to establish Esther's innocence.'

'What? I am game so soon as the proper authorities are prepared to listen to my evidence.'

'That is not sufficient. You must find Esther out; learn where she is, see her, and get her to tell you what she knows. There is some mystery. It may be she is trying to screen her grandfather. I cannot account for her playing hide-and-seek in any other way. If not that, then something has happened to her.'

'I will do what you wish. If she is in concealment, her grandparents will know. Leave it to me to worm the truth out of them. I understand all that sort of thing better than those blundering owls of police. Of course the Moridegs would tell them nothing; *me*—that's altogether different.'

'Thank you very much, Justin. I am so troubled at heart about the poor girl. I do like her. There is a great deal more in that girl than most people imagine.'

'I'll go directly. Nothing like knocking off a thing at once.'

'Do so; and tell her—tell her, Justin, that nothing will make me believe she did this dreadful thing intentionally. Mamma does not know her as I do.'

Justinian started for Trewortha. He did not ride his cob because the way was very bad, so rough with stones in places, and so boggy in others, that it would have taken him longer to reach the place on horseback than on foot.

As he approached the throat of the valley where the Trewortha Tor throws out its feet against those of Newel Tor on the other side of the stream, he saw the policeman lounging about, as though he had nothing to engage him.

Justin accorded him a supercilious nod and was rushing past, when the constable said, 'Excuse me, sir, but may I ask where you are going?'

'Where I am going?' repeated Justinian haughtily; 'what the deuce is that to you? Do you know who I am? I call this cheek, I do. As if I might not be where I chose. I suppose these moors do not belong to you, Mr. Tregaskis, but are free to any one to cross?'

'Oh, certainly, sir. Only I was——'

'Only you were wholly unwarranted in asking such a question of me. I take it as impertinence.'

Then Justinian walked on, switching at the heads of fern and gorse, at anything on which he could vent his disgust.

Presently he turned his head over his shoulder and looked back. The constable was following at a distance. He clenched his teeth, stood and hacked at a thistle with his stick till he had hacked it to the ground, looked back, and saw the policeman still coming on.

Then he strode to meet him, and said haughtily, 'Are there not other ways than this to Trewortha? What do you want there? or—may I flatter myself that you are following my traces?'

'I beg pardon, Mr. Justinian; I had no wish to offend, but I have my duty to discharge.'

'Well, and what is that?'

'Why, I have to catch that party, sir—beg pardon—Esther Morideg.'

'Then, why do you not catch her?'

'She is hiding from us.'

'If hiding, why do you come to Trewortha? You are not likely to find her there. Of all owlishness that ever was, there is nothing like that of the rural police!'

The constable was nettled.

'Well, sir, you may say that if you choose. I know very well she is not at Trewortha; but seeing as you was a-keeping company with her——'

'What!' Justinian's face became scarlet.

'No offence, sir; I suppose it's no secret. All the country knows that you've been keeping company with Esther, and walking out with her.'

'And so——'

'And so I thought you might perhaps know where she be. And, sir, let me tell you, if you do, it would be better to tell me. No offence, but seeing you coming this way, and thinking you might know, or come to know, where she is, I thought I might take on me to give your honour a caution that it would be a serious matter to assist in any way to conceal her or get her off. It would make you, sir, an accessory.'

'I think this an insufferable piece of impertinence,' said Justinian indignantly. 'To talk of me—of *my* keeping company—and then as an accessory. I'll tell you what it is, Tregaskis;

I'll speak to my father, who is a justice of peace, and get your name struck off. It is intolerable to have police so insolent. Turn your nose in another direction, please, and do not dog my footsteps.'

'I must do my duty, sir.'

Justinian swung himself about and proceeded on his way, panting with anger, his brow suffused with colour from shame and indignation. He wished heartily now he had never met with, never condescended to be gracious to a common girl such as Esther. 'Vulgar people will make their vulgar comments; they imagine what does not exist.' He had half a mind now not to proceed, but he had made a promise or given an assurance to Alice that he would see the Moridegs, and so he must go forward.

In no good humour he approached their hovel, and almost ran against Esther coming to it from an opposite direction.

At the same moment that he saw her, so did the constable, who gave a shrill call on his whistle, and began to run. Instantly there started up three more constables from behind rocks and the mounds that marked the sites of prehistoric habitations, and ran also, concentrating on the hut of the Moridegs.

Esther saw that she must be captured if she remained, and she turned. She looked first at one then at another of those running towards her before she resolved on her course, and then bounded down the slope and darted out on the marsh.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ACROSS THE MARSH.

Trewortha Marsh is probably unique anywhere. Being an old lake-bed silted up with the wash from the granite tors that surround it on every side, all which granite tors are more or less impregnated with tin, the bed of the lake is to a large extent a settlement of the metal. The ruins of villages of all ages from prehistoric antiquity, which cover the slopes of the hills that dip into the morass, are those of mining peoples of different races and languages, who at different times have sought to recover the sunken treasure.

They have waited till the water was low that they might turn up the bed of the lake; they have toiled at the granite barrier to saw through it and let the water off; they have dammed the streams back that flowed into it; but the lake-bed has never yet been thoroughly explored—never had more than its shoals turned over. Here and there is, as it were, an island in the wide expanse where the water was so shallow that it could be dyked out, and the rubble explored for tin till the metal it yielded was exhausted, or till the dykes gave way, and the water overflowed again and covered all save the heaps of discarded refuse thrown up by the diggers.

But it was not tin alone that Trewortha Marsh offered to explorers; it yielded gold as well, though not in large quantities; and a squire whose land stretched up to it in the seventeenth century boasted of the heavy gold rings that he had obtained from the precious ore recovered from the marsh, and gave to his daughters.

The fact of the lake morass having been searched over wherever practicable by man has made its surface most unequal. Here, a little above the level, rises a grey tract of crumbled granite that has been turned over and thrown up. There, again, are depths which the miners at one time by great effort kept dry, and searched till they were abandoned to the dark peat-water again. Here are tracts of quaking swamps that seem fathomless, over which a tripping foot may pass on the green moss, but which will engulf any one who stands still for a minute. There are courses of dark water too wide to be overleaped and too deep to be waded through.

Into this morass many an ox has run and sunk and disappeared. It is said that men who have ventured to attempt to cross it have perished in like manner. Treacherous, deceptive, a maze to whoever enters it, in one place alone can the moor-man pass over it who is aware of its intricacies and acquainted with the secret of the track.

The keen, observant eye of Esther had seen that her sole chance of escape lay in traversing the marsh. A policeman had sprung from behind a rock on the further side of the stream that flowed into the basin, and would pursue her if she attempted the moor on that side. Another had appeared in the direction of the Grey Mare, to intercept her should she endeavour to return by the way she had come; and to run up the stream was not to be thought of, not only because Constable Tregaskis was coming down it, but also because it led in the direction of cultivated and inhabited land. She must return to the depths of the wilderness, and her only way of returning to it was over the surface of the marsh in whose abysses lay the city Tresillan. Happily, she knew the track.

Many a Sunday had she stepped from hummock to hummock of rushes and from spit of rubble to islet of gravel till she had reached that spot in the marsh where, far down, lay the church of Tresillan, whose bells could be heard tolling for service in the dark peat-water; and often had the fancy taken her that she heard the sunken bells.

Esther did not run out far on the marsh before, in full confidence of her security, she turned, folded her arms, and looked at her pursuers.

Three of the constables were making for the morass, from the several places where they had been when they first saw her. Esther laughed. She knew that they could not reach her. Tregaskis was coming after her, following exactly her course. She was not afraid of him. She could throw him out. Then her eye went in search of Justinian, and she saw him running, not towards the marsh, but along its bank, leaping the divisions that marked the old boundaries of paddocks and fields and pounds of the ancient settlers, making in the direction of the Grey Mare. Esther had been obliged to come to the habitation of her grandparents because she had exhausted her provision of food. She had gone, as appointed by her, to the Grey Mare, and had found nothing there. The reason was that the old Moridegs knew that they were watched; they were well aware that if either of them went to the granite mass called the Grey Mare, he or she would be followed, and the deposit of bread there would be found, and that then an ambush would be laid for Esther. After consultation together they deemed it advisable not to carry anything to the Grey Mare. If Esther discovered nothing there, she would know that they were precluded from visiting the spot, and would make an attempt to obtain food elsewhere. At any rate, it would be a notice to her that her grandparents were prevented from following the arrangement made. Esther had understood this. But food she must have. She might, she knew, venture into some farmhouse or cottage on the moor and beg there; but though the elder inmates might not betray her, yet there was risk from the chatter of the children. She therefore preferred to run the risk of going to her grandfather's habitation, trusting in her own agility and knowledge of the marsh for escape should she be pursued. Unhappily, she had been observed before she had time to obtain from her grandparents what she so much needed.

Esther waited on a heap of 'streamer's' refuse till she saw that Tregaskis was within a stone's throw of her, and then, with a taunt cast back at him, she started again. Light and elastic, her foot not resting for more than a throb of the pulse on the yellow-green surface of moss, she passed over a tract of quaking bog. To reach it she had leaped; for a bog of this description has its margin so fine and filmy as to be incapable of sustaining the weight, whereas a little further on it is dense as velvet-pile. Across this Esther literally danced. She turned her head for a moment over her shoulder, and in that moment saw the constable disappear. He had attempted to follow her on the quaking bog, and had gone in. He sank at once to the armpits, and only saved himself from going under altogether by throwing out his arms and clutching at the moss.

Being in, to extricate himself was not possible. He must shout to his fellows to bring poles to lay across from the more solid ground upon the bog, by which he might clamber out.

Another of the constables was running in bewildered fashion up and down a tongue of rushy land that was a peninsula, with a wide reach of unfathomable bog-water on every side of it save that by which he had come out upon it. Advance was impossible. A third had come to the conclusion that he could not thread the mazes of the swamp, and was endeavouring to return to the mainland, but could not find how to retrace his steps.

Meanwhile the old Moridegs—Roger, with pipe in mouth and hands thrust into his pockets, and Tamsin, with a scarlet kerchief tied round her throat—were standing outside their hovel, watching the proceeding with a stolidity that seemed indifference. Esther saw by a motion of her grandmother's arm that she desired to catch her attention She stood still, and detected that she pointed hastily to the Grey Mare.

No sooner did Esther perceive this, than she bent her steps in a different direction, so as to deceive her pursuers as to where she purposed leaving the marsh.

As she went on, she disturbed many wild-fowl that had made of this region their home and breeding-place. In 1680, an old squire who lived at Trebartha Hall, the nearest residence of a gentleman, composed a poem on the charms of his place, and did not forget to celebrate the virtues of the great marsh :

> To fine fowling he that is a lover
>   Of that delightful sport
>   Let him streight here resort.
> He cannot miss of duck, cock, tail [teal], and plover,
> Widgeon, nor wild goose, hearn [heron], and snite [snipe],
> Nor dove, nor thrush, nor hatterflight [jacksnipe],
> Heathpoult, nor partridge, nay, nor pheasant.
> If this don't please, I know not what is pleasant.

In one place Esther came across the horns of an ox protruding from the bog. The brute had got in, and had sunk, holding up its head with the nostrils above the enclosing peat, till that had covered them, then it had suffocated, but had not sunk further, and the white horns still gleamed out of the grey moss that formed a film over the treacherous surface. Toads, water-voles, leaped into the ooze as she disturbed them, or wild-duck whirred away.

At length Esther came upon an islet of rubble on which were cairns and mounds, marking temporary habitations of searchers for gold or tin, who had remained on the spot instead of returning nightly to the mainland through the dangerous swamp. From this place she could see that the constables had recovered Tregaskis from his dangerous position, and were making towards that point on the margin where they conjectured Esther would leave the morass for the bank.

She made her way on in the same course as before, till she came within a bowshot of the margin, when she turned sharply round, retraced her steps over the morass, and sped as fast as she could towards the north, took the one ford over the stream that wormed its way through Trewortha, and reached a long arm of firm land that ran into the morass, and was crowned by two barrows, under which lay some of the dead who had once toiled for gold or tin in the marsh. This arm was so slightly raised above the water, that to such as did not know the contour of the land it was overlooked, yet, having reached it, an immense advantage was gained by Esther, as she was able to run along on it as fast as her feet could carry her, without any impediment to stay her. By this means she reached easily the main bank of moor-land, whereas her pursuers were left a mile in the rear, and moreover to reach her had to make a difficult circuit.

Relaxing her speed, she now ascended the down, among the tufts of whortle, and whin, and heather, at her leisure, till she reached the Grey Mare, where she found Justinian, who had made for it in a direct line, at the recommendation of Roger Morideg. He was lying with his back against the rock, and was behind it.

'Look here, Esther,' said he, 'I have brought you a loaf your grandfather gave me. He told me to come to this point. I don't half like it, though. You see, my father is a magistrate, and it looks ugly for me to connive at your escape. Of course I don't believe you have murdered old Physic, and what is more, Alice has commissioned me to tell you that she believes you are innocent. All the same, I don't like to seem to favour your escape from the police.'

'Her says I never killed 'n?' Esther tossed her head.

'Yes,' said Justinian. 'My cousin, Miss Alice Curgenven'—he had before said 'Alice,' and regretted it. He now gave her her proper title. 'My cousin, Miss Alice, has enjoined me to assure you that nothing will ever make her believe that you committed the crime. I myself——'

'You don't think me that wicked, do y'?'

'No, I do not. I know very well that there is a mistake somewhere, but where, I am at present unprepared to say.'

'So'—Esther was pleased, and smiled—'so you and Miss Alice sez Esther bain't so bad as volks say.'

'Exactly. Only we do not understand your conduct in running away.'

'And she—what does she say?'

'Whom do you mean by *she?*'

'Why, sure—who but your step-mother?'

'I don't think she has said anything about it. She has been, and is still, very unwell. She has not been out of her room for some days.'

'Look y' here,' said Esther, laying hold of Justinian by the arm, and speaking with vehemence. 'You mind and say to her just what I tells to you. You go to her and say, "Esther—her'll die game and never speak." Do y' understand now?'

'I don't understand. I don't see how I can. I will say this to her, but I'd like to know what concern it is to her. What have you to do with Mrs. Curgenven?'

'Aye—she loves me.'

'Does she? That's news. Now, Esther, I can't stay here. See—the men, those police fellows, are concentrating on this spot. In a quarter of an hour they will be on you, and I particularly do not wish to have been observed in conversation with you. I have already had to undergo insolence and annoyance. Esther—tell me. How came this affair about? Unless you know something about it and had some hand in it or other—though, as I said, I entirely disbelieve in you having done it—why are you in hiding from the police?'

'I do know about it, and I don't want to say naught.'

'Did your grandfather shoot Physic?'

'You heard,' answered Esther, turning sullen, 'I ain't a-going to say nothing about it. I've took it on myself, and that's enough.'

'Do you mean to tell me you have taken the charge of murder on yourself to screen another?'

Esther moved from foot to foot impatiently and uneasily.

'I won't say nothing. There now. If I gets snared in everything I sez, mere talking wi' you, how'd it be if lawyer fellers were to set on me and worrit me? They'd have it all out in ten minutes.'

'In ten minutes you'll be in the hands of the police, and then the lawyers, if you will, will be on you.'

'Them perlice!' laughed Esther. 'They'll never touch me. Look. I'll climb up a-top o' the Grey Mare. I'll stand there, and let 'em all see me, and come runnin' on up hill and try to ketch me, and just to the last I'll give 'em the slip.'

'But I do not wish to be seen, myself.'

'They shan't see you neither.'

'How will you manage that?'

'Wait and see.' She ascended the rock, and standing against the grey sky waved her hands and shouted defiantly. Justinian, who was concealed behind the rock, looked out cautiously, and saw that a couple of men were approaching. He was greatly annoyed, alarmed, and incensed; the girl had shown herself, and he must infallibly be seen either where he was, or running away as soon as she fled. She might run faster than her pursuers, but he himself would be recognized, and might get into trouble for having been with her without making an attempt to detain her.

'It's coming!' shouted Esther, looking down on him.

'Confounded bother it is. I wish I'd never concerned myself to bring you the loaf.'

He could hear the call of Tregaskis to Esther to stand and give herself up.

In another moment—suddenly—he, Esther, the rock were wrapped in a moor fog, dense as a pall of cotton wool. Esther sprang off the Grey Mare and came to him.

'There,' said she, 'I told you so. The pisgies—the Good Folk 'd never let them take me. I seed 'n coming. I seed 'n first come ower Brown Willy, then her came along Hendra, and I were sure nigh to a minute when her'd be on us. Now come along wi' me. I'll take you away to where you can get your road home, and I can be off to my place o' hiding. You may walk now bowld as i' the streets of Liskeard, and no one 'll never see you, if they was five paces off.' Esther laughed. 'Do they think to take me on the moor? They'll never do it. They canna do it.'

She walked on with Justinian a little way through the mist, and then stood still.

'Gran'fer cannot come to the Grey Mare wi' bread for me, and I must ha' some'ut to eat. Whativer is to be done? I'll get along with this you've given me a bit. After that I must ha' more, and where is it to be brought to? They're watching gran'fer and gran'mother I reckon. Oh, dear! what shall I do? Now so—I'll tell y' where it is. If I'm wanted, go to the top o' Brown Willy. I trust you—I'll trust no other. If I'm to live—I must have bread; if I gets none—why I reckon I shall starve. But you don't forget what I said. Tell her—I'll die game and say naught.'

She bounded away and was lost in the mist. Justinian found himself by a granite post that he recognized and by a track the direction of which he knew.

CHAPTER L.

A CONFIDENCE.

Justinian entered Theresa's room, and going over to the fireplace stood with his back to it. She was sitting some way from the hearth, near the middle of the apartment, in her arm-chair, listless, doing nothing. She wore a dark-blue velvet loose dress, with lace frills about the throat and sleeves. Her face was almost as white as the lace, and her eyes as dark as the velvet.

The boy had not seen much of her during the last few days, and he had sufficient observation to note, and sufficient feeling to be startled at, the change in her. The face was thinner, the features sharper, the hue more deathly. All energy and brightness were gone out of her. Percival was by nature sanguine, and he either did not notice what was clear to the boy, or he considered it as of no real import. Not that he did not love his wife, he loved her so much that he would not allow that she was seriously ill. Love takes one form or other, of exaggerating or of minimizing the danger of the person loved.

Anxiety was wearing out Theresa, as well as actual sickness, or rather the anxiety induced sickness, and then enfeebled her, so that she was unable to shake it off.

She had hoped, when she consented to be Percival's wife, that the struggle for existence was terminated, and that for the remainder of her days she might be able to bask in the sense of security and in assured comforts. No more holding of the door against the wolf that sought to break in, with a knowledge that the slightest relaxation of muscle, abatement of tension of effort, would leave her a prey of the ravening monster. No more struggle against failing powers and the weariness of exhausted endeavour; no more occupation of debatable land with sword and bow, without camp behind on which to fall back. Such had been her expectation when she married. And she had been disappointed in her anticipation. Her position she had acquired was menaced, was precarious, and she had been forced to make an attempt to secure it which had led to a terrible casualty, from the consequences of which she was not safe.

The thoughts of what she had done, vain repinings that she had not acted otherwise, dread of the catastrophe when the truth was known, uncertainty how to meet it, all wore her, almost paralyzed her. It was not that she cared much what happened to herself. Life had lost all its charms for her. When she was married and came to Curgenven, life had burst into flower, and the future gleamed before her full of tranquil, sunny blessedness. A blight had fallen on her hope. Her only solicitude was for Percival and the family into which she had been taken up. He had been kind to her, he had done what he could for her, he had been a helper out of her distress; and she could not endure the thought that by her means disgrace and trouble should fall on his loved head. She thought and thought, but could see no way out of her embarrassment, no gleam of light on her darkness.

'Step-mother,' said Justinian, 'whom do you suppose I have seen and chatted with?'

She looked up at him, patiently, without inquiry in her eyes or on her lips.

'And I am the bearer to you of a most unintelligible message.'

'To me?' She spoke without tone of interest in her voice.

'Yes; I have actually had a few words with Esther Morideg.'

A sudden flush rose to Theresa's cheeks, and her hands trembled as she laid them on the arms of her chair and raised herself from her supine position.

'Yes, step-mother, I have. It ought not to have been. There is a warrant out against her, and the police are chivying her like a hare. I dare say it was all wrong. I ought to have stopped and held her till the constables came up; but I'm not the sort of fellow to care to play amateur bobby, so I didn't do it. I was not born to be a policeman, nor have the inclination to become one. The blue-bottles are paid to do their work, let them do it. I don't care what the law may be, I won't stoop to that sort of mean work. The fact was, Alice sent me to the Moridegs to see if I could learn where Esther was, so as to convey a message to her. Alice is a chivalrous little Don Quixote of the feminine gender, and will not believe that Esther is guilty.'

'No, she is not guilty.'

'I know she is not,' pursued Justinian. 'I have evidence that she is innocent, for I saw the pistol in its place when I went for my gun. And I'm glad to hear that you take the same view as Alice and me. I wish the governor did, but he is too impetuous in jumping at conclusions to arrive at right ones. Well, step-mother, I found that the Moridegs were closely watched, and that they were unable to take food to Esther at the place appointed, and so she came herself after it. Then that impudent monkey Tregaskis and some other fellows gave her chase, and I let them run, I knew Esther could distance them, and old Roger begged me take the loaf for Esther to the Grey Mare, and I did so. I did not exactly want to speak with her. As she is under suspicion, and a warrant out against her, I did not like to seem to help in getting her away, and help of course I did when I took her bread; but then, on the other hand, I couldn't be such a cad as to refuse. Well, Esther threw all those fellows out who were in pursuit and came to the Grey Mare, and I gave her the loaf. I had promised Alice, if possible, to see the girl and give to her Alice's assurance of confidence, and so, of course, having promised, I had to do it. If I made myself amenable to the laws, all I can say is, the laws be blowed.' Justinian straightened his back and looked consequential. 'Then Esther gave me a queer message to you. She said I was to tell you she'd die game and hold her tongue, or something to that effect. But hang me if I can make any sense of it. Why is it she wants you to know that she will not tell?

Theresa, who had been listening with quivering attention, sank back in her chair, closed her hands, and in a faint voice answered, 'I cannot say.'

'Of course not,' said Justinian, 'nor any one else. But the whole affair is an enigma to me. Why is Esther cutting about on the moors, half starved, and hiding—goodness only knows where—when there is no occasion? She never shot Physic. He did it himself. His wicked conscience for once spoke; and I'll tell you what, step-mother, the explanation will come soon enough, as soon as ever his affairs are looked into. It will be discovered that he has been making away with some of the moneys for which he was accountable. I dare be sworn that he has taken handfuls of Curgenven rents and has poured them into his own pocket. The boss never looks into accounts, he takes all on trust. And what Physic has done to my father he has done to others. I should not be surprised if Sir Sampson had frightened him. There was some talk at Cartuthers about Physic and his accounts, and Sir Sampson said he was going to take his affairs out of Physic's hands now that Physic had taken to mining speculations. He advised the governor to do the same. Well, my theory of this business is that old Physic found his iniquities were coming to light, and afraid of conviction and transportation, he took a dose of lead. Why, step-mother, I've heard the gardener say he saw Physic come this way, and go towards the bungalow not an hour—hardly above half-an-hour before he shot himself. That is the explanation. He came here, found no one in, went to the bungalow, took the pistol, and he had so much gentility in him as not to shoot himself on our grounds, but out on the moor. Mark my words—that is the true story, and all these owls of police, and magistrates, and my father, and every one else will come round in the end to my opinion. Those fellows never see further than the extremity of their noses. I don't mean the governor—he is led by the rest; I mean Tregaskis and idiots of his calibre—and they are cheeky too.'

'Do you think they will not take Esther?' Theresa half rose in her chair. She had put together her hands—thin white hands they were—she opened them, and then clasped them again to conceal their vibration.

'How can I tell? Not whilst they have such unintelligent fellows as Tregaskis after her. But she cannot go on for ever hiding. The moors don't stretch out into infinity, nor can she go on to eternity without food. How anything is to be conveyed to her, I do not know. Her grandparents dare not venture to carry bread to her, and the Grey Mare is now blown upon. I don't mind telling you that *I* know the whereabouts of her hiding-place, but old Roger can't take food there, or all those blue-bottles will be after him like what they are—blue-bottles.'

'She must have something taken to her.'

'I don't see it. If she is innocent, let her surrender. No harm can come of it. It's all moonshine and nonsense. She is frightened, because she is half a savage, and does not want to be locked up for a bit; she is afraid of that, just as any wild bird would be afraid of a cage, and hate the notion of being clapped into one. But, bless you, it's only for a night or two; I could get her out like a shot with the evidence I could produce in the court. If I had had time at the Grey Mare, I'd have told her so.'

'Oh, Justin, do see that she has what she needs.'

'That is all very fine. I'm to carry her crumbs, but I want to know why? If she's innocent, let her come forward and trust to me to get her off.'

'There may be more behind—something she does not wish to say.'

'I don't believe it. What can there be behind? I have told you I know exactly how it all came about. She may possibly have seen old Physic kill himself, and she, in her ignorance, supposes that this may compromise her—that is all.'

'She must be helped. She cannot remain in hiding for always.'

'Let her come out and clear herself, I say.'

Theresa's heart beat rapidly. She could no longer endure the burden of her secret, no longer bear to have no one whom she could consult, and who might assist her in her difficulties. She dared not confide the truth to her husband. It was from him, above all, that she desired it should be kept concealed.

She had tried the rector in a much lighter matter, and he had proved his reluctance to help her. She had no one else to whom she could put out her hand but this boy, who, with his self-assurance, his energy, and his sound heart, could serve her in her need. She made an attempt to stand up, but her strength was not equal to the effort.

'Shall I assist you, step-mother?'

Justinian came to her and took her by both hands, and she rose to her feet. Something of her former vigour revived in her.

'Justin,' said she, 'I must say to you what I could not say to another. I did it!'

'Did what?'

'I shot Physic!'

He let go her hands and sprang back with an exclamation of horror.

'It is true. I did not intend to do it. It was an accident. But for all that—I did it.'

Justinian stared at her, speechless in his dismay.

'Esther saw what took place, and she has run away, mainly that she may not have to appear in evidence against me. I would not have your dear, dear father know this for worlds. Now you understand what was meant by the message of Esther to me. She is a faithful girl, infinitely grateful for the little kindness I have shown her. I assure you—I do assure you—it was an accident.'

Justinian was still too shocked to speak.

'I can bear the sense of what I have done no longer without speaking, and I want your help. Esther must be got away. Should she be taken, then I must tell all, and there is something behind I do not wish to tell, something that would greatly affect all your prospects. There is but one hope—that Esther may be got away. Then the matter can remain unexposed. Do not ask for more information. Let it suffice that I did it, that Esther is screening me, and that for your father's sake, for the sake of the Curgenven family, the real truth must be concealed.'

Justinian had recovered himself by this time; he took a turn up and down the room, then went to the window and looked out. The day had closed in rain, in cloud and rain intermingled, that gave prospect of continuance for some days.

'I see,' said he. 'If you put the matter in my hands, I'll manage it. Of course she must be given the means of getting away. Have you any money?'

'Yes—a few pounds.'

'That will do to begin with. I will see her; I must go where she is to be found, and take her something to eat, and I'll manage somehow. I think I might contrive to get her off to the Sandwich Islands. I'll turn it over in my head; don't concern yourself about it. I am glad you did not apply to my father, he'd have lost his head over it at once. The only point to be really considered is which of the Sandwich Islands to send her to. I forget in which the volcano is, of course she must not go to that. She will be in her element there—all savages together. What is the name of the volcano? Kea-Roa?—I forget. I'll ask Alice.'

CHAPTER LI.

CAPTURED.

Justinian did not go in quest of Esther the day that ensued for two reasons. In the first place, it was a day of incessant heavy rain. In the next, his project of sending the girl to the Sandwich Islands, on riper consideration, did not appear feasible.

The young fellow, after he had recovered the consternation into which he was cast by learning that his step-mother was the actual person who had shot Physic—and this recovery was not a long, protracted affair—was not dissatisfied at having a heavy responsibility laid on him. As he put it to himself, his step-mother had done the wisest thing possible in trusting him with the secret, as no one else in the world was so capable as himself of helping her out of her difficulties.

Dashed at first in his self-assurance at finding that his admirably elaborated explanation of the mystery of the death of Physic was groundless, he speedily recovered his self-confidence in the gratification of knowing that he alone was in the possession of the facts, and that placed him in a position of superiority to magistrates and police and the public in general.

After having cudgelled his brains as to the best method of disposing of Esther where she might be secure from pursuit, he remembered a boy acquaintance—the son of the parson at Clovelly in North Devon, and he wrote him a characteristic letter :—

'Dear Bob,—I want you to do me a favour. There is a girl who can climb, like a goat, anywhere, and I want her to collect birds' eggs for me at Lundy. You knew I was making a collection four years ago, when you were at the grammar school at Liskeard. Well, Doctor Jenkins, you know, promised me his collection, and he gave it me. There were a lot of awfully jolly sea-birds' eggs in it. Well, he did a thing of which I don't approve. Five days after, he took it back, and gave it to another chap—that little sneak Williams, you remember him. I think I behaved like a gentleman in that I did not shake the box and break all the eggs before I gave it up ; but then I am a gentleman, you know. The Curgenvens always are that, if nothing else. As to young Williams, he is a cad. He never gave me one of the eggs. For one thing, I would not have taken any had he offered them. The school has gone down awfully since that affair of the eggs. And now I hear it is not thought anything of except by the shoppies, who send their cubs to it. That affair disgusted me rather with egg collecting. But I am going to begin at it again. They are starting a museum at Liskeard, and I fancy it is the thing for us Curgenvens to be the principal benefactors and patrons, so I shall give it my collection of birds' eggs when I have got one, and for that reason I want a lot from Lundy Isle. I have considered and send you a sort of a wild girl, and I want you to put her across to Lundy Isle, and leave her there as long as she thinks necessary in order to collect birds' eggs for me. I have a pair of guillemots, but I want more, and they of all sorts. This girl will go anywhere over the cliffs. I shall send her across country. My notion is to drive her part of the way, and then let her work along as best she can. I shall provide her with enough money to pay expenses. Don't say anything about this to any one. I particularly want it to be kept secret. I don't want it to come to the ears of any one in Liskeard, that they may be thrown off their balance when they learn as a surprise the munificent benefaction. So, dear Bob, mind and do what I ask you for the sake of old times, and get that girl put across at once to Lundy Isle, and leave her there, birds'-nesting, till I tell you she may be shipped back again.

'*Vale*, old chap.'

Justinian dispatched this letter, and congratulated himself on having formed so plausible an excuse for sending the girl to Lundy, without having been obliged to state anything that was not strictly true.

The second day was as rainy as that preceding it. The skies were blurred over with formless cloud. The wind was in the south-west. The leaves turned up their lower sides to the wind; rills formed by the side of the gravel walks and washed the gravel away, pools stood on the terrace. A hateful day to be out, thought Justinian; but then, with compunction, he considered how doubly hateful it must be to the poor girl on the moor, crouching in some wretched place of concealment, exposed to the drive of the rain and the rush of the wind. At lunch, when he ate his cutlet and mashed potatoes, and drank his glass of claret, his conscience stung him, that he was pampered whilst she was starving—she had had but one loaf, and that must by this time be consumed.

What should he do? Would he find Esther if he went in quest of her? But was he justified in delaying the execution of his design? Was not this detestable weather the very best for his purpose? Those owls of police, as Justinian said to himself, would never wet their shins on such a day as that, hunting up the unfortunate Esther on the moors, exposed to the worst of the weather. When he had sat for some time brooding in the smoking-room with his father, answering the remarks of the latter shortly, and looking into the fire, he said suddenly: 'Governor! I don't fancy you have any idea how ill step-mother is. You take it all ghastly easy, but I believe she is wasting away. Every day she looks worse. I don't like it at all. That old humbug, the Liskeard doctor, is not enough; if I were you I'd send to Plymouth. Indeed, I wish you would do it for my sake, for *I* am uneasy about her. She is a different-looking woman altogether from what she was when she first came here.'

'You don't mean to say so!' said Percival Curgenven, starting up. 'I'll drive into Liskeard and telegraph at once. Why did you not tell me this before?'

'Why, governor, you have eyes as well as I.'

'I'll go at once.'

He rang the bell; and when the servant answered—'Tell George to get the dog-cart ready at once. He is to accompany me to Liskeard,' said Percival.

'And,' added Justinian, 'tell James to have my cob put into the cart—also at once.'

'Where are you going, Justin?'

'After birds' eggs—anywhere. I won't stick in any longer on such a day as this.'

'Then come with me.'

'I can't, governor; I want particularly to go somewhere else.'

It was not a gracious speech. He felt it was not, so he altered his tone and said, 'The fact is I have written to Bob Rawley about some eggs, and there's a matter connected with my letter I must attend to.'

'Shall you take James with you?'

'No; I shall go alone.'

'Well, I'll go up-stairs and see your step-mother. By Jove, I'd no notion she was so bad. I don't know what I should do were——' His voice trembled, and he ran out of the room to conceal his emotion.

Justinian then got the housekeeper to put together some food, and had difficulty in framing a reason. She brought a small package of sandwiches. That, of course, would not suffice. He must have double, three times the amount. Should she put him up a flask of sherry? Yes; and a loaf of bread and some cheese—cake also. He might want it or might not. Wasn't sure he should come back that night. Anyhow, no harm done if there were too much food—he could chuck it away, or give it to some who needed it. Justinian was accustomed to be open in all he did, and he was clumsy over his excuses. He had much better have made none—simply given his orders and no explanation with them. But this did not occur to him till he had bungled at putting his demands in a plausible form.

Then he wrapped himself in a waterproof and drove away. He had a long journey before him. He must skirt the moors on their western flank, and, when he reached the main artery of traffic with West Cornwall, either follow it over the Bodmin moors to an inn called the Jamaica Tavern, leave his trap there, and thence strike north over the waste, or else still skirt the moors till he reached the watershed between the Atlantic and the English Channel, put his horse in at a farm, and thence strike west. He was doubtful which course to take, and had not made up his mind when, with steaming cob and himself in a soaked condition, his waterproof notwithstanding, he drew up at a little hostelry called Five Lanes, where he reached the main road, and where the decision must be taken.

To his infinite annoyance, he saw in the doorway the face of the policeman Tregaskis, who, however, at once dived into the kitchen of the tavern, and Justinian trusted that he had not been recognized. 'If he has seen me,' said the young fellow, 'he is too big an ass to draw any conclusions from it.'

He had turned the cob to the door, but now, instead of halting to give it a mouthful of corn. he impatiently whipped the brute, turned away from the inn, and drove down the steep lane leading from the main road to the village of Altarnun. He elected to take this way, as that in which he was least likely to be observed on leaving the door of the Five Lanes Inn. 'That's how the public money is spent,' growled Justinian. 'That police fellow goes loafing about and looking in wherever there is a pretty girl, and sits and toasts himself by the fire, ogling her and talking soft-sawder. And we have to pay for it all. It is too disgusting! I wish I were a magistrate. I'd make them caper, like the old fellow on hot plates in *Sandford and Merton*. But I shall be some day, and then let them look out—that's all.' He lashed the cob as though it were a policeman he were stinging to his duty.

The road was narrow, and was an almost continuous ascent for three miles. The cob must walk; all collar work, no trotting ground.

'If it had not been for that pig Tregaskis, I'd have walked,' grumbled Justinian, 'and done it in half the time. A horse is about the slowest of any living creatures, after a slug, when walking. Why should that fellow have gone to Five Lanes?—and just now. I don't suppose he spends three-farthings for the good of the house. Had I put in there, it would have been half-a-crown into Mrs. Bone's pocket. Now she's half-a-crown short, and all along of that bobby.'

Justinian was not in a good humour. The wet had spoiled whatever amiability had been in him when he started. The waterproof had served to conduct all the rain that fell on his hat and back down to the cushion and had saturated that, so that he was sitting on a sodden sponge. Moreover, he was facing the driving rain, and the driving rain penetrated up his sleeves, and went in under his chin, soaked his shirt and sopped his collar.

He had resolved what to do. He would take Esther, if he found her, and drive her across country to Bude, see that she was settled in somewhere there, and arrange for her to go on by the coach next day to Clovelly.

If he did that he could not get home the same day, that was not possible. The cob could not stand such a stretch in wet weather.

'It will be disgustingly compromising, hang it! Good gracious! what would the boss say if he heard of it?—or the police? Hang it! I wish I were well out of it, but I can't help myself. I've undertaken the job, and I must go through with it. I'll put up at Trevillian's Gate; there is a farm there, and I know the old chap. He'll give the cob a feed and wipe down, and I'll make Esther walk along the road, and pick her up, so that they won't see us start together in the direction of Bude, which might astonish their minds.'

He arrived at Trevillian's Gate, and got the farmer to attend to the horse. Then he started off over the downs in the direction of Brown Willy. This mountain stood behind another, a bolder ridge—Rough Tor—and this had to be ascended or circumvented before the object of his journey was attained. The farmer was not a little surprised at the young gentleman coming there and starting thence, on such a day, for a moor ramble. He asked a number of questions—wanted to know Justinian's purpose, the point to which he was going, how long he would be away, what were the contents of his package, whether his society as a companion would be acceptable; if not, whether his boy had not better accompany Justinian, to guide him in the event of his being unable to find his way, or, having reached his destination, was unable to find his way back. He entered into minute particulars as to what bogs were to be avoided and what watercourses crossed, and which landmarks observed in the event of Justinian desiring to go in such a direction, and which in the event of his purposing to take another.

Justinian was exasperated and perplexed. He was forced to decline well-meant offers, and to evade pointed questions. He was detained longer than he liked, as he had some miles to walk and to return, and before him, should he bring Esther with him, was a long drive in the dark through intricate lanes.

He knew his direction pretty well. Rough Tor loomed before him in the rain, wreathed in cloud. He was sufficiently versed in moor wanderings to be aware that he must keep to high ground, and he had shot snipe over the bogs in the bottoms in winter and knew where they lay, and which were dangerous.

'Confound these country bumpkins!' muttered the lad as he went along, 'they are as inquisitive as women. They see so few folk, that the arrival of a visitor is to them as welcome as an orange to a child—both to be sucked dry.'

On reaching the first elevation he looked about him.

Through the rain and drifting cloud he distinguished figures, but could not make out whether of cattle or men, at some distance on the moor in his rear. 'I do not remember passing any beasts,' he said. 'I suppose horses—can't keep themselves dry this weather, poor devils, going from place to place in quest of shelter, and finding none.' Hugging his bundle of bread and sandwiches, he ran down the further side of the hill.

After a long and weariful trudge, and none is more weariful than where the feet sink at every step in oozy soil, and the knees are beaten by wet branches of heather, Justinian reached the foot of Brown Willy and began the ascent. The whole of the summit was wrapped in whirling masses of white vapour, cloud driven up from the ocean and caught there. It was like a huge mass of scoria smoking with internal fire, or would have been so, had it given off the least heat. Justinian set his face determinately at the hill, and began the steep scramble among hummocks of furze and turf, through boggy patches where the moisture that condensed on the mountain had broken out and spread over its flanks, scrambled among a chaos of tumbled granite blocks like moraines of glaciers, then over short turf, slippery as glass with the wet. He was speedily enveloped in the cloud, and then could not see many feet before him. He could not, however, miss his way; he had but to climb straight before him till he reached the summit.

'And when I get to the top—the highest point in this howling desolation—what then?' asked Justinian. 'Who is to see me? If I shout, who is to hear me? It will be a confounded nuisance if I have had to come all this way, and been exposed to all this weather, in a wild-goose chase. However, I have undertaken the job, and so must carry it out.'

Up among the crags, in and out among the slippery, fallen stones, stumbling, catching at bushes, panting, hot and cold at once, inhaling fog dense as smoke and smelling of the sea, Justinian toiled on. Now his parcel fell from him, and would have bounded down the mountain side but that it was happily arrested by cluster of stones a few feet below.

'By Jove! here I am!' exclaimed Justinian. 'Here is old King Cole's mausoleum.' He referred in this flippant manner to the great cairn on the highest horn of Brown Willy.

'Now I am here—what next?'

He seated himself on the cairn. He might have been on a fragment of a ruined world, drifting in space. Above, around, below, was only dense fog sweeping along before the wind, not now condensed into rain, but thick, palpable, obscuring every object within a yard. There might have been no world below. As the vapour drove by, it was as though the cairn itself were swimming, were rushing along, and parting the milky nebulous sea, and leaving it in streamers in its wake. The granite stones of which the great pile was constructed were black with lichen, like reindeer moss, but with white antler-like moss springing up in the interstices. For a moment Justinian thought of the old king in the heart of this cairn, and how he was drawing water of heaven into his golden cup.

'Here is a pretty go,' said Justinian. 'Up in the clouds and without a prospect of achieving what I came for.'

He had hardly muttered the words before he heard a shout; a strange call, that startled him, and made him spring to his feet and step down the side of the cairn. It was as though the buried Cornish king were calling to him from his sepulchre.

His heart beat a little faster.

'Hang it! what can that have been? Not Esther.'

Again the voice—a hoarse, strange voice; not a mere cry, but a jabber of confused words.

'It's not human; I swear this is uncomfortable,' said Justinian, with contempt for the fears that nevertheless prompted him to leave the cairn. He had not descended below the heap of granite stones before he heard the voice again, this time nearer. It issued from some masses of rock thrown together in confusion below.

He cautiously descended towards this accumulation of stones, and became aware that there was some sort of arrangement in the blocks.

He approached, not without caution, partly because of the rapid descent of the mountain side and the slippery condition of the turf, but partly also from uncertainty as to who or what was the inmate of this cave, or whatever it might be.

'There's a sort of door—a something over it,' said the young fellow. He stooped to his knee. A door there was of two upright granite jambs, with a lintel of the same material thrown across, not more than two feet six inches above the soil. He put his hand through to draw back what seemed a mat, but let it fall again as a cry like that of a wild beast issued from the chamber into which for a moment he had looked. He was resolved now to search out the mystery, and again he thrust in his arm, held back the curtain, and looked within.

He saw a heap of heather, and on this heap, tossing, a figure. In the light that entered by the opening, he distinguished the white gleaming arms as they were flung about, a face and flashing eyes.

'I'll die game—I wi'n't speak a word—I swear it!'

'Good heavens! Esther! Esther!—is that you? Esther, I say—speak!'

At that moment, out of the mist dashed three men, and ran in upon Justinian.

'Thank you, sir. Thank you kindly for leading us to her. Now we've caught her, that's fine!'

Tregaskis spoke, and with him were two other constables.

'You fool!' said Justinian, angrily, 'do you see—she is either mad or ill.'

CHAPTER LII.

THROWING UP THE BALL.

WITH difficulty Esther Morideg was drawn out of the beehive hut in which she had taken refuge. Her clothes were soaked, she was in a fever, and delirious. The wet, the exposure, the cold, hunger, had driven her temporarily from her senses.

Tregaskis, constable though he was, treated the poor girl with great kindness, spoke gently, caressingly to her, told her not to be frightened; that he and the others would get her to a house where she would be put into a warm bed, and made comfortable. She did not heed him. She seized Justinian by the arm, and drew him to her, and muttered hoarsely, 'I'll die game. Tell her so. I'll not speak a word.'

'I have a flask of sherry with me,' said the boy. 'Let her have some—she must be starving.'

'She is in a fever,' said Tregaskis. 'Now, sir, we must carry her, or get her to walk between us all the way, or will you run on to Trevillian's gate and bring your cart over the down to under Rough Tor? I think it can be got so far.'

'I'll do it,' said Justinian.

'And—look here, sir! We'll just be so bold as to borrow the cart of you to take her anyways as far as to Five Lanes. She can't be brought on foot that distance. Very considerate of you, sir, to bring the trap for us.'

'I will do what I can,' said Justinian, biting his lips. 'Of course, there is but one thing now to be done—to see that she be cared for, and have the doctor to her. She is very ill.'

He hurried away down the mountain side. He was angry with himself, angry with Tregaskis. Instead of being the means of helping Esther to escape from the moors, he had, like a fool—he said that to himself—led the police to where she was concealed, and he was the only person who could have done so, for no one else had a notion where she was.

But after the first ebullition of vexation at his mismanagement of the commission given him, he recovered. The girl was seriously ill. What could he have done, had he found her in this condition without some one at his back to assist him? What, under the circumstances, could have been done save remove her to a place where she would be attended to? He could not have allowed her to remain in her cell on the mountain top, among the clouds, there to die in fever and delirium. He must have gone in quest of assistance, and assistance brought there meant the revelation of her place of retreat, her removal, and consignment to the custody of the police. After all considered and said, what had happened was perhaps the best thing that could have happened. What would have been the fate of the poor girl but for him? How could her life have been preserved but for him? How would the police have found her but for him? On all sides a debt of obligation was due to him. So he held up his head once more, and felt that he was a person of importance.

The sick girl was brought to Five Lanes, and Justinian insisted on Tregaskis taking her in his trap; he would hire another, and one far less convenient, at the inn for himself. So he was left behind, and the constable with his charge, and another policeman, went on towards Curgenven. He, Justinian, waited till a clumsy horse was put into a still more clumsy two-wheeled conveyance, and in this he was driven at a slow jog towards his home.

'After all,' growled Justinian, 'that precious noodle, Tregaskis, has brought to Mrs. Bone, of Five Lanes, more than the half-crown I calculated on spending there. I shall have to give seven-and-six, and a bob to the driver, for this beastly trap.'

The son of the landlady at Five Lanes drove him, but Justinian was in no humour for conversation. Not only was he wet and chilled after the walk and after having become hot in the scramble, but the temporary elation, that had followed on his depression at having been the vehicle for the discovery and arrest of Esther, passed off, and he began to realize for the first time in his life that he had played a sorry figure—that in the first place he had made a fool of himself in giving occasion of talk relative to himself and Esther, to such an extent as to have led Tregaskis to watch him, with the conviction that through him the whereabouts of the girl might be discovered.

In the next place, it was a humiliation to his self-esteem to feel that he had been outwitted by the 'owl,' the 'idiot,' the 'jackass' whom he had treated with such impertinence, and to know that he had placed himself at this man's mercy. Tregaskis could, if he chose, make the matter unpleasant not for him only, but also for his father. It would indeed be a scandal if it became public that he, the son of a justice of the peace, had been aiding Esther to evade capture on a warrant issued by his own father.

A bitter medicine is the humiliation of self-esteem, and the more bitter the greater the self-esteem is. Justinian had not valued himself, his abilities, his position, at a low figure, and the consciousness of his having blundered egregiously was to him now as wormwood.

But conceited though he was, his nature was healthy and his heart right, and by the time he had reached Curgenven he had resolved on what he would do. Instead of going directly home, he drove to the constabulary residence, and there dismissed the trap. In the cottage lived Tregaskis with his sister, considerably older than himself, who kept house for him. Justinian entered, and was told that Esther was being cared for by Miss Tregaskis, a clean, kind-hearted, energetic, and sensible woman, and that the doctor had been summoned and was momentarily expected.

'Look here, constable,' said Justinian, 'I'll tell you what I have come for, not only to ask after the poor girl, but to beg your pardon. I've not behaved right to you. Now, if you choose, you can make it hot for me. However, let no considerations one way or the other influence you, do what is your duty. If you think it well to say that because there had been some silly chatter about me and Esther, you watched me so as to discover her retreat, you are welcome. I know she is innocent. I have evidence that will at once clear her. Knowing that, I went to find her. I could not account for her running away. As for the chatter, it is not well-founded. Miss Alice, my cousin, and I have both pitied and liked the girl, so has my step-mother, and when all the rest of the world went against her, we rather held to her, and believed in her. I don't want any sort of nasty gossip to grow out of this, there has been enough of idle talk already; it will deepen into something worse if it comes out that you followed me in order to find where she hid. As far as I am concerned, if I have given occasion for such talk, I must bear it, but it will injure *her*. And it will trouble my dear father exceedingly. There you have it in a nutshell. If you can, without breach of duty, spare us, I shall be for ever grateful to you; if you can't, well, I must bear it, and so must my father, who will, I suppose, resign his magistracy. But, first of all, consider what is your duty, and do that. As for the past, and my impertinence to you, an officer under the Queen, I heartily, unreservedly say—I am sorry, and ask your forgiveness. There's my hand.'

Tregaskis saluted, he was too modest to accept the proffered hand of the young squire, but he said:

'Sir, Mr. Justinian, I am touched. You may rely on me. I will not say a word beyond what I am obliged. I am heartily rejoiced to hear that you can clear Esther Morideg. I, myself, have had my doubts about her guilt, for I have learned that the lodge-keeper saw Mr. Physic go towards the Hall only twenty minutes or half-an-hour before he was proved dead, and the gardener saw him near the bungalow. Besides, the butler says he called at the house to inquire after Mrs. Curgenven. All which points to suicide rather than murder.'

'Then I can swear,' said Justinian, 'that the pistol was in its place on the rack an hour before, as I was in the smoking-room of the bungalow after my gun, and saw it there. So that, unless Esther were seen going to the bungalow within that hour, the case against her falls to the ground; and unless the bench be as great owls as coroner and jury, they will see that, and dismiss the case against Esther.'

'There are difficulties still—what she said to the dowager Mrs. Curgenven. But I dare say the girl saw what took place, and was frightened, and ran away, thinking that in some fashion the seeing Mr. Physic shoot himself would bring her to trouble. Can't say—it may be so. But as to yourself, sir, I'll not say anything I needn't say, not only for your own sake, but for hers. Poor maid, she's suffered enough already, and is now terrible off her head. I reckon she must have been days and nights in soaking clothes, without fire or food. She's got a rare constitution, but it would want that of a rhinoceros to pull through such contraries as she has undergone.'

Justinian walked off. 'Tregaskis is not such a bad fellow as I thought him,' he commented, 'nor quite such a fool as I supposed; he'll get on in his profession. I'll speak to the governor to give him a leg up.'

On reaching home the hour was late, past the dinner-hour, but his father was not below. The butler told Justinian that Mr. Curgenven was up-stairs with the doctor from Plymouth. The boy hastily dressed, glad to relieve himself of his sopping clothes, and then ran down again, to find his father with the doctor descending the great staircase.

'Above all,' said the latter, 'she must not be agitated. Any shock, any strain might be fatal. I don't say she may not pull through—but you must be careful. Mind this—the best doctor, the best nurse, are absence from anxiety and from worry; negative nurse and negative doctor, but keep her amused.'

Justinian could say nothing to his father at dinner, the medical man was there, and in a hurry, as he had to catch a train, but he saw that his father's face was grave, his mind abstracted, so that he either did not hear or found no humour in the doctor's jokes.

When the latter was gone, Justinian went to his father, took his hand and said, 'Governor, is she very bad?'

Percival pressed his son's hand and his lip quivered, he could not speak.

'May I go and see her to-night, gov.?'

At that moment the door opened, and the servant who was acting as nurse came in, and said that her mistress was very anxious to see Mr. Justinian, if he were returned.

'Go, old boy,' said Percival. 'It will fidget her if she does not see you. I say,' he drew his son to his side, 'you won't mind, will you, giving her a kiss? she will value it. She hasn't but me who cares a snap for her, I mean. She will be pleased, you know, and perhaps you mayn't have many chances.' He stopped for a moment, and gulped something down. 'Justin, she does like you. Now don't excite her, be very quiet. But if you could kiss her, it would be better than a sleeping-draught. I know it would give her so much pleasure. I don't know what I shall do—but go along, don't keep her waiting.'

On entering his step-mother's room, Justinian saw her sitting where he had left her many hours before, in the same attitude, the same picture of mute despair, a small dark figure in the large room decorated with light curtains and paper, her dark hair shining doubly dark against her white face and throat. He was touched, and stepping over to her, stood behind the chair, leaned forward, took her head between his hands, and kissed it.

A flush of colour rose into her pale cheeks, and a light smile formed on her lips.

'Dear mother—dear, dear mother,' he said, fondling her thin white fingers, 'you must get well, you must do so for my father's sake and mine. The governor is in a dreadful take-on about you. 'Pon my word, I don't know what he would do without you. There—you really will make an effort to shake this off. It's only a good lusty effort is needed to make the dad and me happy again.'

'Dear Justin,' said Theresa, 'I would do anything for him—anything I could—and for you. I love you both. I have no one else to love. But now tell me, what have you done?'

'I must not excite you. That old codger, Tonks, said so.'

'I shall be far more excited if I do not know what has taken place. I shall fret and work myself into a fever.'

'Oh, my dear mother, you are too cold and white to get into a fever through any amount of excitement. I have just seen fever, what it really is, and you might as well talk of scrambling up Salisbury steeple as of getting into a fever.'

'I really must know.'

'And I really do not think I ought to tell you.'

She looked steadily at him out of her great dark eyes.

'Indeed, Justin, it would kill me to be left in suspense.'

He seated himself, as he had done once before, at the time when they had made peace, on a stool by her side, looking up into her face.

'Hang it! I don't know what to do. I've gone boggling about doing the wrong things all day, and chaps I've turned up my nose at have had twice as much wits as myself. And now, here am I—I heard old Tonks say you were not to be agitated, that it was as much as your life was worth to be excited, that you must be left in the most complete repose.'

'But I cannot repose; I shall not sleep a wink till I know all. Where is Esther?'

'Must I say?' The boy looked at her disconsolately. 'If I do you harm, I shall never know an hour's peace. My dear mother, I have such a pain in my heart now because you are ill. I cannot endure more, indeed I cannot.'

'You have bad tidings, and fear to tell me. Tell me all, or I shall imagine something far worse than the reality.'

'Well, if it must be. Esther is in the hands of the police.'

Theresa dropped her hands on her lap, and looking dreamily before her said, 'I thought it would come to that in time.'

'She is in high fever. The poor girl has suffered dreadful exposure, and has undergone great privation. When she was found, she was delirious, and she is so still.'

'She did all in her power for me. I will not desert her.'

Theresa spoke in a tone of weariness and resignation.

'You know,' said Justinian, 'there is no reason why all should come out, if you don't wish it; and, of course, it is better it should not. It is only to trail a red herring across the path, and the police will go after it like a pack of hounds.'

'It must all come to light now,' said Theresa. 'I fought against it as long as I could, but it is over—I mean fighting. I have not the strength. It must all come out.'

She spoke calmly.

'I say, I hope this won't upset you, and prevent your sleeping to-night.'

'No, I had made up my mind for it. I knew it must come. I have felt it here'—she touched her heart—'a sort of something here that told me to—to throw up the ball.'

'I am so glad you are not agitated.'

'No. I am past that. I should have been agitated unless I had been told all. Now, it is as well as it is. You will see Esther, tell her——'

'She is not in her senses.'

'Yes, I remember, you said so. When she is herself again, assure her that she shall get into no further trouble. I will tell all.'

'But there is really no necessity.'

With a faint smile Theresa said, 'There is no more game after the ball is thrown up. I throw up the ball.'

'Esther keeps on repeating that she will be silent. That is what her heated brain holds to.'

'More reason why I should speak. Justin, dear'—she put her hand out to him and he clasped it—'Justin, dear, it is to me an infinite comfort that you have got over your prejudices against me, and that you like me. You will never believe I did this thing intentionally. I did it without knowing what I did, and I was fighting your battle and your dear father's, though you were both unaware of it. You will find that out now. To-morrow, it is too late now, to-morrow morning let the rector and Mrs. Jane come here. I want to see them all, and tell all before them and your father and you. You will go for them?'

'If I must.'

'I wish it. And now—good-night. Kiss me once again, Justin, it does me good.'

CHAPTER LIII.

THE END OF THE WILL.

At breakfast next morning Justinian asked his father how the patient was.

'She has had a quiet night; she is getting up now, and told me to remind you to bring old Pamphlet and Jane. What she wants with Jane, I can't think; about the last person I'd like to see. And Jane is not the person to come here, unless to gloat over Theresa's illness.'

It was unusual for Percival to speak harshly of any one, but he made an exception relative to Jane Curgenven. When he did say sharp things, it was with a jaunty, good-humoured air, that showed those who heard him that he did not mean what his words implied; but it was otherwise now. His tone was full of bitterness as he referred to the dowager Mrs. Curgenven.

'I believe that woman, if my dear wife were dying, would'—Percival tore the toast he held in his hands to pieces, and ground his heel into the floor—'no, Justin, I won't speak of her. She makes my blood boil. She is one of your self-righteous people who believe no one can be a good Christian and respectable who does not hector and lecture the poor, take a class at Sunday-school, and believe in missionaries. Justin, I've knocked a good deal about the world, and for narrowness, spitefulness, lack of charity, commend me to your professional angels.'

Percival's hand quivered with anger. He said more in his wrath than he really felt when cool, just as sometimes in his jokes he gave vent to sentiments he did not seriously entertain.

'Justin, in the Arctic regions the Esquimaux wear a sort of wooden spectacle, with a tiny slit in each eye-piece, and they see nothing but what comes just within the radius of this slit, and that they see only for harpooning purposes. It is so with creatures of the Jane Curgenven type.' He thrust away his plate. 'I've lost my appetite. I have done breakfast.'

'Please, sir, a gentleman wants to see you.' The butler spoke, standing in the door.

'Who is it?'

'I think, sir, it is the young Mr. Physic.'

'Oh! show him into the study. Stay—no—show him in here, he must have ridden or driven over, and may like a snack.'

In another moment a youth was introduced, dressed in mourning, but in mourning of the most groom-like cut—short coat, tight breeches buttoned down over the calves, a black silk tie, with a horseshoe pin in it.

'How do, sir,' said young Physic. 'Come early, I know. Heaps of business since my poor uncle's affair. Awful affair his. Amount of business to me overwhelming. I'm not used to it.'

'Are you going on with his business?'

'I! Lawk, no! Haven't the head for it. Never took to an office. My uncle at one time did offer me a place at his desk, but kicked me out before the fortnight was well over. Sell his business. Hope I shall get an offer. Anyhow, I'm clearing out, that's why I came over. Here's something I've jumped on I s'pose concerns you. Here you are.' He fumbled in his breast-pocket and pulled out a long envelope.

'Mr. Physic, you must have had a long drive or ride.'

'I rode.'

'Then surely you will be glad of a little refreshment. We are rather late at breakfast to-day. My poor wife is very unwell, and it has upset our arrangements.'

'Thanks, I'll peck a bit.' Mr. Physic drew a chair to the table.

'I say, I found that paper there in my uncle's desk. It has "Curgenven" on it. Will, or something of the sort. I don't want it, you may have it. I suppose it belongs to you. I know nothing about these sort of things. I'm clearing out; as soon as decent I'm going to marry, and set up here—I mean at Liskeard. Livery stables is my notion. Pot a lot of money that way and enjoy life. That's the straight tip, eh?'

'Why, preserve me! This is a will—it is dear old Lambert's will!' exclaimed Percival.

'I dare say it is. S'pose so. Looks like it; smells like it. I hate all your legal papers, make me sick. Give me a stable, that's your true home for a man of taste.'

'Why, murder!' exclaimed Percival. 'It is the very will old Fizz—I beg pardon, I mean Mr. Physic—flourished with, and thought with it to scare me and my poor wife.'

'Ah! I'm glad you like it. Thought 'twas something in your way,' said the heir of Physic. 'Now, I'll trouble you—let me see, Mr. Justinian, you cater—to a kidney, and some of the toast under. To my mind, there ain't nothing as'll beat toast under kidney, well saturated and hot.'

'I'm afraid this is not quite hot,' said Justinian.

'Never mind; it would be better hot, but it's good as it is. I'll thank you for the potato chips, they look scrumptious.'

'Justin!' said Percival, 'run with all your legs to the rectory and fetch the venerable Pam and Jane. They must see this, and, by George! we shall have to put heads together and consider what is to be done. I'll attend to Mr. Physic.'

'You haven't,' said Mr. Physic, 'just a nip of something warmer than that chilled coffee, have you? I've had a long ride.'

'I think I can serve you,' said Percival. 'By Jove! this is a perplexing affair. I don't know what to say to it, and which way to take it. I don't even know whether the will is a genuine article, or got up just to scare, like a turnip-head with a candle inside. Run along, Justin. 'Pon my word, I've a great mind to tell Theresa. It might interest her, and she's awfully dull up there in her room. It can't excite her harmfully, and it might be a stimulant to her jaded interest. I'm shot if I won't try it. Tonks said she was to be kept amused. You will help yourself, and excuse me, Mr. Physic.'

'Certainly, certainly, sir; make yourself quite at home with me. I never stand on ceremony myself, in my little box.' Percival went up-stairs.

'My dearest,' he said, 'such a joke!—actually old Fizz was right. There *was* a will.'

His wife looked up into his face lovingly, but with little inquiry in it.

'I mean—don't you remember?—Physic frightened you once with hinting that there had been a will made by Lambert that left everything to Jane and Alice. Well, there was such a will.'

'Yes, I knew it. But where is the joke?'

'Well, it's a grim sort of joke too, for I suppose it turns me out of Curgenven. But I haven't mastered the contents, only old Fizz did not speak without grounds as I supposed.'

'And the will——'

'Here it is. It has turned up. A cub of a nephew has come in for all Physic's property, and has found it, and brought it here. He understands nothing about it, all his thoughts are on horses.'

Percival put the will into his wife's hands, and she laid it unopened on her lap.

'I know its contents, Percy,' she said. 'It beggars you. You will have to begin the world again.'

'For myself I don't care, but for you, T.'

'For me?' She looked wistfully at him for a while, and then said, 'If I were young and strong, and this came on us, I would not blink, but say, that at your dear side I would face the world. We would go somewhere—anywhere—together, and your hands and mine together would avail to find us bread. But now, Percy, it is too late. All my strength is spent, my confidence is gone.'

She turned the paper over and over with her wax-like fingers.

'Percy,' she continued after a pause, 'I knew about this, but you have little idea how I strove to obtain it, and what I did to get it.'

'Why, T.?'

'Why? Oh, I was so afraid of it being produced, when you, who are so happy here, and so completely now in the right place, would be thrown out with nothing.'

'My darling, I fall on my feet everywhere. I do not require much to be happy, so long as I have you and Justin.'

'You do not require much, but you do require something, and what have you got?'

He did not answer. In his careless manner he had not thought out the consequences to himself.

'And, T., darling, if you had got this will, what would you have done with it?'

'Burnt it.'

'Then I am glad you never did get it. That would not have been right.'

'But Jane would have nothing to say to it. Even the bribe of Curgenven would not induce her to accept the position as a condition for receiving it. Who was harmed?'

'That was not the question. It was Lambert's will.'

'Yes, Lambert's will.' She turned the paper over on her lap. 'I have read it through. It was written under the supposition that I was alive, and had made my presence known and felt. Not a word, from beginning to end, of love, of consideration for me. Not one farthing left to provide necessaries for his real wife, the woman he had sworn to cherish, for richer for poorer—whom he had vowed to endow with all his worldly goods. All was to go to the other woman, to indemnify her for the fraud he had committed on her, as if no fraud had been committed on me in deserting me, a poor young thing, in leaving me helpless in the world, and not asking even what became of me. I had no reason, Percy, to respect his wishes.'

'My dear, Lambert is dead.'

'Yes, he is dead.'

A pause ensued. She was looking straight before her into vacancy.

'It seems to me plain as daylight, T.,' said Percival. 'Old Lambert had this property left him unreservedly, and he could give it to whom he chose. He intended it to go to Alice. That was his wish, and he had a right to leave it to her. Now I know that for certain, I will clear out whenever required. I can always accommodate myself to circumstances.'

She gave him back the will, and said—

'You, with your clear eyes, always see what is right. Yes, do as you think best. I was wrong, very wrong to meddle in the matter; but I did it for all your sakes. I loved you—not Jane—you and Justin.'

The servant tapped at the door.

'The rector and the dowager Mrs. Curgenven are in the drawing-room.'

'I will be down at once,' said Percival. 'Good-bye for a few minutes, T. I'll give old Pam and his daughter the will, and pack off young Fizz, then I will be up with you again.'

'I wish to see the rector and Jane.'

'They shall come with me.'

She held his hand.

'I am so sorry, so sorry, dear Percival. I have another great trouble for you.'

'Troubles do not oppress me greatly,' said Mr. Curgenven, and left the room.

As Percival entered the parlour, the rector stepped forward with a benignant smile: 'How are you, my dear Percival, and how is your wife? I hear a bad account of her from every one. What is it? Has she caught a chill?'

'I have brought you something that will astonish you,' said Percival, not answering the questions. He caught an eager look in Jane Curgenven's eye, and thought, perhaps unjustly, that she was hoping the news relating to Theresa would be bad—had come there with the desire to hear she was in danger. Why, otherwise, that keen flash in her eye?

Percival was prejudiced, and he would not shake hands with her, or notice her; he spoke to her father alone.

'That old fellow, Physic, left his debts and his receipts, his bills and banking account, to a snob of a nephew who won't take on the business. This fellow has been rummaging in Physic's desks and cupboards, and has come on the paper that I hold. You shall look at it. Physic said something about it to me, but I thought it was all gammon, and gave it no great heed. However, here the document is. I have just shown it to Theresa. Physic had been scaring her with it, so she says. Look, it purports to be a will of Lambert, in which he leaves everything to Alice. I suppose it is all right. You take it and read it over between you. I have left the young Fizz in the breakfast-room with the spirit case open, and I must see to him.'

Then Percival left the apartment.

Mrs. Jane pursed up her lips and planted her feet flat on the carpet.

'Now then, papa, what is this?'

'My dear,' said the rector, looking at the paper which he held with one hand, whilst he combed out his whiskers with the other, 'it is just as I said; there was no doubt about it. Lambert had been married to—to—*her*.'

'He never was.'

'Of course, it is most dreadful to think it, and if I had had the very smallest suspicion——'

'Papa, never mind your suspicions, small or big. Read out that paper. Is it what Mr. Physic hinted about—a will that cast abominable reflections on me?'

'It is, my dear Jane, a will—— Excuse me till I look it over.'

'Well, look it over then, and when you have done that, pass it on to me.'

The rector, with a face very blank and combing vigorously with one hand, read the will. It was not long, and could be run through in half a minute.

'Well, papa?'

'Well, my dear, it is as I said. I really don't know what to say. We shall have to come to some arrangement with Percival. The thing must not be talked about. I would not for a thousand pounds that it should get out that you had not been properly married.'

'I was properly married. You married me yourself.'

'Yes, dear, but then the first wife was alive.'

'She was not alive.'

'My dear, she really was. Here she is now—Percival's wife.'

'She never was Lambert's wife.'

'My dear, really you cannot maintain that. I wish, with all my heart, that it could be proved she had been his—his—the other thing, you know—and not his wife. That would have been a great comfort, a great consolation. But, you see, what with the register——'

'That was a forgery.'

'And with this will, signed by Lambert himself, there can be no doubt about it, no doubt whatever. He calls you by your maiden name, Jane Pamphlet, otherwise known as Jane Curgenven. It is very shocking, and to happen in my family it is almost sacrilege; and it will, should it become public, materially interfere with my ministerial influence and efficacy. How can I, you see, Jane, reprimand in cases, unfortunate cases——'

'Now, never mind all that, papa. Do you mean to tell me you believe this abominable paper to be a genuine document?'

'Of course it is. There is Lambert's signature—I know it very well—and it was witnessed by old Roger Morideg and also by Pike. The paper is perfectly genuine. There, also, is Lambert's seal with the Curgenven arms.'

'Let me see it.' Jane snatched the will from her father, and ran her eye hastily over it.

'Good gracious! Oh, Jane! Oh, goodness! My dear Jane!' Suddenly the rector whirled about on his heels and faced a landscape in oils hanging on the wall. 'This is certainly by Jeffrey. I know his style—these pale cobalt blues and creamy shadows, and his foregrounds always weak. I could swear to that tree—so blotchy, and no particularization about the rocks in front. Yes, certainly by Jeffrey.'

Then in came Percival.

'Will you both come up to Theresa's room?' he asked. 'I've packed off that little snob, sent him with Justin to look at the stables. Now then, come along, and bring the will with you.'

'The will!' gasped the rector. 'Ahem! Percival, I've been studying this landscape. It is by Jeffrey, is it not?'

'The will?' said Jane, in defiant tone. 'There is no will.'

'Lambert's will I left with you.'

'That!' sniffed Jane—'that insolent document! It was a fabrication by Physic.'

'Never mind, I must have it.'

'You can't. *I've eaten it.*'

'Eaten it!'

'Every shred, every letter, and the sealing-wax as well.'

CHAPTER LIV.

ONCE MORE 'INVENI PORTUM.'

PERCIVAL introduced the rector and his daughter into Theresa's room. Jane was startled and shocked at the change that had taken place in the wife of the Squire of Curgenven, and with a qualm at her heart she regretted certain bitter feelings she had of late yielded to and harsh words she had expressed. The greenish hue about the mouth, the wax-like whiteness, told a tale that could not be misunderstood.

Theresa's eyes seemed extraordinarily large and dark, but they lacked the lustre usual in them.

The rector was the first to approach her and hold out his hand. Theresa, however, did not take it.

'I will not,' she said, in a low tone. 'I would have you first know what I have to say. You are not aware to whom you offer your hand. If, after what you have heard, you care to give it me, I will take it with gratitude. I have been engaged——'

She pointed to the little table at her side, where she had been writing; a sheet of paper was thickly covered with characters.

'It is not now I have done it. I saw it must come. I have written a little one day—or night, then a little more. It is done now, all but my signature, and that I wish to add whilst you are here, that you may know what I have to confess.'

'To confess!' said the rector, with a quiver in his voice. 'I'm not a party man. I particularly object to anything that may be said to savour, to—to wear an aspect—to——'

'But really, papa,' said Jane, in a hard voice, 'really, papa, there is nothing to alarm you in this. It is a written confession, I understand, she wishes to have witnessed.' In an undertone she said, 'Papa, do be sensible. It is all coming out now about that affair with Lambert. I knew it would.'

'My dear, it is an affair I wish to hear nothing about. It cannot be wholesome. I never allow myself to hear of anything that might not come out of or go into *Peep of Day*, or *The Dairyman's Daughter*, or any other very good work suitable for children and bedridden old women.'

'Papa, you really must. It is to save my reputation.'

'But—but—if people talk, *my* reputation will suffer.'

'Papa, I insist.'

'My dear, if it must be! Oh, I wish I had never come here!' Combing his whiskers with both hands, he stepped slowly towards Theresa, and said resignedly:

'Well, what is it, then, my dear Mrs. Curgenven?'

'Mrs. Percival,' was the correction thrown in by Jane.

'I feel,' said Theresa, slowly, as a faint colour came to her cheeks in two spots, 'I feel that the time has come when it is my duty to tell all I know.'

'My dear T.,' Percival was at her side, 'can you not put this off to some later period. You really are not strong enough to bear anything that may excite you. Tonks said you were to be kept quiet; I was to amuse you, but not worry you.'

'It would worry me, Percy, if I were not allowed to speak. I have felt convinced for some little time that all efforts to conceal the truth were in vain. That faithful, devoted girl, Esther, has done what she could.'

'That has nothing in the world to do with it,' said Jane bluntly.

Theresa turned and looked at her.

'How, nothing?'

'Nothing with that affair of Lambert.'

'I do not understand you. Esther knows all about the death of Mr. Physic.'

'We know that very well,' said Jane; 'and now I am glad to hear she has been arrested. High time! In our nineteenth century—to give the police the slip! It was preposterous. They did not half look for her.'

'I hear that she is under arrest, and charged with the murder of Mr. Physic,' said Theresa.

'Yes, it is so.'

'She was not guilty. She had nothing to do with it. She held his horse at a distance, that is all.'

'But how can you tell, T.?' said Percival. 'My dear, what is the meaning of this? If Esther be innocent, of course she will be discharged. You need not fret yourself about her.'

'She must be discharged. She had no hand in it whatever. She drew suspicion to herself to save me.'

'*You*, T.?'

'Yes. I had done her a little kindness. She is a warm-hearted, grateful creature; and to draw away suspicion from me——'

'But, my dear T., suspicion could not possibly attach to you! You were ill at home, confined to your room.'

'I was there—for all that; I was there, on the moor at Tolmenna.'

'It is not possible!'

'It is true. I took the pistol from the bungalow, I——

'Stay, stay!' cried the rector; 'I will hear no more. This is most dreadful. I would not for the world! There would be so much talk. It—it might interfere——' He ran to the window, seized the curtain and wrapped it round his head, muffling eyes and ears. Through the folds could be heard a mutter of words, but whether these were 'advancement' or 'ministerial efficacy' could not be distinguished.

Jane Curgenven went after her father.

'Papa, be reasonable. Do pay attention. You must come out of that.' She endeavoured to unwrap his head, but the more she strove to release him the further he wound himself up, till his head resembled a vast cocoon of a silkworm.

Finding her efforts unavailing, and unwilling to lose a word of what was being said by Theresa, she turned back to the chair of the sick woman. Theresa looked round with a face full of distress and plea for mercy.

'I shot him!' she said.

A dead silence ensued. Percival and Jane were too much astonished to speak. Neither quite believed that Theresa was in her senses. They thought that she was labouring under an hallucination.

'I knew that he had that will. I did not wish my dear. dear husband to be thrown out of Curgenven to struggle with the world for a livelihood. For myself, I could not face the prospect. I was weary, weary to death of the voyage against contrary winds; beaten, battered by storm. I had not the strength, not the self-confidence, not the courage. I—I could not, no, I could not go back to what had been. Alone it would have been bad, but with Percival worse. Mr. Physic offered to sell me the will for the family jewels.'

'Not those diamonds of Lady Margaret's?' gasped Jane.

'The family jewels,' repeated Theresa. 'I could not give them up, and yet I could not let him keep the will. I tried to frighten him. I can't tell you all—it is written here. I have put it in this paper at length. But I solemnly assure you I did not know the pistol was loaded; I thought merely to threaten Mr. Physic. You, Mr. Pamphlet, advised me——' She looked round 'Where is the rector?'

'Never mind, he can't hear,' said Jane; 'that is to say, he doesn't choose to hear.'

'I thought it was the last blast of the storm, and then I would be at peace. I was weary—I wanted rest. I—I never meant it—I——'

'Theresa, dear, do not distress yourself,' said Percival, going to her. She was sinking in her chair. The slight colour had gone out of her cheeks. She was death-like in her whiteness.

'Will you take my hand, Percy? there is blood on it. But I never, never meant to kill him. It was rest from care and battle that I wanted. I had fought and toiled all my life. Every one was against me; no, not every one, you loved me.'

Percival seated himself on the elbow of her chair, put one arm round her to hold her up, and clasped her hand.

She was silent for some while, breathing heavily, and gathering her failing, scattered senses.

'Percy, where is the table?'

'Here, love.'

'I want to sign it all.'

'I pray you be calm, and do not concern yourself about it.'

'I must do it. Esther is in prison.'

'No, not in prison, dear.'

'She is very ill, and the police have taken her. Give me the pen—where is it?'

She turned in her chair and groped for the paper and pen; her sight was failing.

'Have you dipped it? Hold me, Percy; hold me up whilst I write.'

She took the pen and bowed her head over the paper on which she had written the story of what she had done.

Jane drew near and watched eagerly.

Theresa was writing laboriously; she seemed not to be able to see the letters she was forming. Then her head sank upon the table, and she lay heavily on Percival's arm.

'Oh, Jane,' gasped he, 'she has fainted!'

'She is dead!' said Jane, and drew the paper from under the white face, and looked for the signature. It was not there. In straggling characters the words were written, and still were wet: '*Inveni portum.*'

CHAPTER LV.

THE RIGHT MEN IN THE RIGHT PLACES.

'Of all the owls that inhabit the British Isles,' said Justinian, 'commend me for sheer owlishness to the police force and the magistracy—present company excepted,' he conceded, waving his hand towards his father. 'I may add, a British coroner and jury. In the first place, these latter found that old Physic had been shot by Esther, and now these former have proved that she did nothing of the sort. If they had stopped there, it would have been well—but they have gone on to declare that he shot himself.'

'Why, Justin, old fellow, that was your own theory.'

Justinian was a little staggered. It had been his theory, and he had proclaimed the police owls for not adopting his view. However, he speedily recovered his self-satisfaction and balance, and said, 'Yes, till I knew better or worse, as you like to take it. It was not my profession or duty to investigate the matter, and on a superficial acquaintance with it, I came to that conclusion which a sound intelligence would arrive at on such data; but when I began to go into the matter, then I speedily found it wouldn't wash. I gave my evidence sharp and to the point—not a word too much. Just what I was asked and no more. Had I observed the pistol hanging in the rack an hour before the fatal affair? I had. What opportunity had I for arriving at this conviction? The best: I had gone into the bungalow to fetch my gun. Where had I gone with my gun? To Cartuthers, to Sir Sampson's. He had a shooting party—only rabbits. Anything more? "Nothing more, thank you," from the bench. So I left the box. Aunt Jane went through her performance, I must say, though I don't like her, well. She had jumped to conclusions on wrong premises, no doubt about it. She had jumped to conclusions hastily, and it was all her doing that the coroner found what he did, or he and the jury, rubbing their stupid noddles together. She got out of it very well. She said just what was wanted, and no more. She told how Esther had come bouncing down on her with the pistol, and had said that with it Physic had been shot. At once, as she admitted, she had rushed to the conclusion that Esther had done the deed; she now admitted that the conclusion was hardly justified. Esther had not exactly said she had done the deed, but that the pistol had done it, a statement quite compatible with the theory that he had shot himself.'

'And then, I suppose, the lodge-keeper was put in the box?'

'No, dad, that fellow Pike next, and he made mental prancings and buck-jumping. He involved himself in all kinds of contradictions, and the bench—Sir Sampson was chairman—had to warn him. I don't think he meant any harm, but that he was intellectually incapable of giving a straight answer. There you have the difference between culture and absence of culture. Whereas I——'

'Yet you deceived the bench just as much as he.'

'I, gov.? Not I. I said what was true—true down to the ground. Had they asked me whether my step-mother had had any finger in the matter, I should have been proud to say what I knew; I could not tell a lie even to save the reputation of the Curgenven family. But not a trace of a suspicion entered their obfuscated noddles that she was out that day, and had met Physic at Tolmenna. Unasked I was not going to tell them—not I. The Curgenven name must not be stained; besides, it was of no use now the dear mother is no more. I would spare her memory as I would save our name. Everything came out pat and to the point. The lodge-keeper had seen Physic ride his cob in at the gates. The butler had answered the door when he came to inquire how Mrs. Curgenven was. He told the butler it had reached him that she had had a fit; Turbot did not send up to inquire, but answered offhand, that his lady was slightly better, but confined to her room. Then the keeper saw him near the bungalow. The next thing heard of him was that he was shot at Tolmenna. He was going to open a mine there, you know. Well, dad, it came out before the bench that old Physic's affairs were in a very bad state, and that there was going to be an inquiry into the way in which he had managed the Camden property. It seems probable that this frightened him. He dared not await exposure. Since his death, frauds have been detected. Then Esther must have seen him shoot himself; she was awfully droll at the petty sessions. There was no getting a word out of her. That is to say, she kept on repeating, "I'll die game, I shan't speak nothing," and she kept her word. Sir Sampson, and the rest of the bench, thought she was an idiot or a savage, and gave her up in despair. But they did not in the least believe, after the evidence, that she had shot Physic, and so they discharged her.'

'How is the poor girl?'

'She is better. She has been awfully ill, but she is picking up now. The Tregaskis family, brother and sister, have been good to her, and keep her with them until she is quite recovered; but they say she is impatient to be back on the moors again.'

'Justinian, old boy, there is a matter I want to talk over with you, but I haven't had the heart since my dear T.'s death.'

'Governor, at the petty sessions the bench, I believe, passed a resolution of condolence with you on your loss.'

'That's all very fine, but why did not their wives come and call on T.? It was the doing of that Jane, I am convinced. I do not know what Jane said, or left unsaid, but she set all the women against her. Dear T. felt it—felt it keenly; it half broke her heart, I am sure of it. Now you'll see—after about six months they'll come calling, or making their husbands come to visit me. I'm disengaged now, and may be captured. In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird; and not one of those women who turned up their noses at my T. shall set foot in this house if I can help it. That's my last word. Justin, I give you full leave to shoot me if I go from it. No, put me in an asylum, I shall be fit for that if I so far forget what is due to her dear and honoured memory. Justin, old chap, it has been my lot to have at my side two of the best of women, and both Bohemians, as I suppose society would label them. Admirable women both; 'pon my word, Justin, I was not worthy of either.'

'What is it that you wanted to consult me about?' asked Justinian.

'Oh, I forgot! It is this, boy. I gave you a sort of rough idea of how matters stood about the property. I'm hanged if I think I have any right to be here, and yet what am I to do? Jane will have none of it. I told you the reason. Besides, she has eaten the will. How she got it down I can't think. And there was a seal too, the Curgenven arms. But a woman of that sort will do anything—has the stomach of an ostrich and the conscience of a giraffe. What is to be done? I don't feel that in honour I ought to be here—and yet legally I am squire—that is, without the eaten will. Really, the place belongs to Alice, or will belong to her when she is of age. I can act as trustee. I believe old Lambert did want me and Jane to be the trustees, but then, when Alice is of age, I shall be bound in honour, I feel, to clear out and make way for her, and of course she will be snapped up by some young fellow, and I must find some other berth.'

'Oh! you need not concern yourself, governor. I am glad you have consulted me, and I happen to be the person—the only person—who could put you to rights. I am going to marry Alice.'

'You, Justin!'

'Why not? It is all settled between us. I shall be of age next year, and Alice eighteen, so we can be married right off then. You can have the bungalow fitted up for yourself, or stay here with us—just as you like. You will be most heartily welcome. Always a knife and fork for you, gov.'

'Upon my word——'

'That settles every difficulty.'

'Upon my word, I'll have you on the Commission as soon as ever you are of age. By George! you'll be a model J.P., and Chairman of Board of Guardians, and all that sort of thing. The square man in the square hole at last.'

'Papa, really I cannot conceive how you could do it?'

'Do what, my love?'

'Preach a funeral sermon on that woman.'

'My dear, I could not help myself. She was squiress, and if I had not done so, people would have talked.'

'I could not have done it.'

'I dare say not, my dear. But, Jane, you are not in my place, have not my responsibilities. I have been ordained, and set apart for the special office and function of giving no offence to any man, that the ministry be not blamed, and I flatter myself that I do my duty. I give offence to none. Besides, in the matter of the funeral sermon, I dealt in generalities.'

'The text itself was outrageous. I turned white and red.'

'The text was perfectly harmless. "Who can find a virtuous woman? her price is above rubies." It was a question. If that were turned into Latin, one would be in difficulties. For if a *num* were employed, it would at once imply that no such person was to be found. Happily our language is sufficiently vague to allow of leaving the question open.'

'But it *did* imply that she was a virtuous woman, and that is precisely what you know she was not.'

'I know nothing. Whatever may have been said whilst my head was wrapped up in the curtain, I, of course, cannot tell. Knowing nothing, I could use that text; and even if I had known anything against her, by throwing the stress of my voice on *can* and *virtuous*, I could have implied, had I chosen, that she was not all she might have been. But I did not choose—I could not offend Percival. And Justinian is just as peppery and ready to fire up at a word of disparagement of his step-mother as is Percival.'

'If I had known you were going to preach that sermon, I would not have gone to church. How about a monument in the Curgenven aisle? You will not allow that?'

'I cannot refuse.'

'Then charge treble fees.'

'Nor can I do that legally.'

'Then insist on seeing the inscription. And, for mercy's sake, have no fibs on that; and no texts of Scripture exalting the deceased into being a saint. That, at least, you can legally prevent.'

'Perceval has been to me already about the monument, and has written out what he thinks a suitable inscription. Here it is.'

Jane Curgenven ran her eyes over the paper her father presented to her.

'Well—the dearly beloved wife—I suppose he did care for her. There are queer tastes in the world. And for the text, what is that? It is Latin.'

'Yes, *Inveni portum:* I have found harbour.'

Jane returned the paper. 'It will do; but, papa, how could you take the text you did, with its allusion to the jewels?'

'My dear, why not?'

'The jewels, papa; why surely you have not forgotten? The Curgenven jewels lost—made away with. It is monstrous. She had some cock-and-bull story to account for their disappearance, no doubt. The fact is, the jewels are gone—made away with. Were they pawned? Were they sold? Who pocketed the money? You may depend upon it there is some ugly story behind the disappearance of the jewels. Lady Margaret Curgenven's diamonds gone! It is too horrible. I wish to goodness now I had not left them at the house. I thought I was in conscience bound to do so, and I did it. Now they are all gone, and you talked of jewels in connection with her and her virtue in church. Really, papa, there is a limit to charity.'

'My dear, I made no definite statement. I never do, I envelop all I say in a cloud of generalities, or take the edge off everything that appears to be a definite statement by qualifications with "but" and "if." I trust that no one can say that I have ever, in my long ministerial career, given any one anything that he could lay hold of. And—but here come the letters.'

The Rev. Mr. Pamphlet opened the first.

'My dear, here is my reward. An archdeaconry and canonry. I really do think I have deserved them, and that I shall be the round man in the round hole.'

CHAPTER LVI.

'CIVILIZATION BE BLOWED.'

THE bells were pealing. A twelvemonth was past, and Justinian was married to Alice.

The rectory was crowded with friends and acquaintances. To attend at breakfast the butler Turbot and a footman had been brought from the Hall. The Venerable the Archdeacon strutted about in gaiters and corded hat, bowing, smiling, saying agreeable things to every one. He had hopes that if he remained absolutely colourless, his teaching absolutely insipid, the way was open to him to become a bishop.

'Well, Percival, a proud day for you, to see your son and heir married. How are you? You don't look over cheerful.'

'Hang it, Archdeacon, no! I can't forget T. It would have pleased her.'

'You must not look back. By the way, you'll be gratified to hear that Mrs. Jordan has joined the Church. Since I have given her my washing, she has left the Particular Baptists, and is now regular in her attendance on my ministrations.'

'I say, my dear Archdeacon, what is the tale I hear about Tregaskis?'

'I really cannot inform you. The man has not attended my humble ministrations for some time, and I hear is leaving, or being turned out of the police force. I have visited him, and I regret to say that I found him in a condition of demoralization very painful to contemplate. Demoralization is, perhaps, too strong a term, but what I mean is resentment against—recalcitration against everything that I and Jane and all right-thinking people cherish. I mean our nineteenth-century civilization, that network of silk that enfolds and, perhaps—well, perhaps embarrasses us, but it is for our good. I said something to him on the advantages of civilization, and his response was neither elegant nor grammatical. He said civilization be——I cannot complete the sentence. To repeat what is neither elegant nor grammatical might interfere with my minis—I mean my archidiaconal weight. It was something that is done to soap-bubbles. Who is that? What is that noise, Turbot?'

'Beg pardon, Mr. Archdeacon, there's Esther Morideg has come in at the front door, right in among the gentlefolks, and never rung nor nothing. She says that she wants—Mr. Archdeacon—to see Miss Alice. I beg pardon—meaning Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

'What is that? What is that?' exclaimed Jane, who was near; then in her energetic, determined manner she rushed into the hall, and there found Esther making her way through the guests, in spite of the remonstrances of John Thomas, the footman.

'I reckon I'm as good a friend o' Miss Alice as any o' these fine folk here,' said the girl. 'Where be she? I want to speak wi' she, and I've gotten sum'ut for she too.'

'Esther, what's the meaning of this?' exclaimed Mrs. Jane Curgenven. 'This is intolerable. In at the front door! If you want anything, go to the back. But, you are not wanted. This is no place for you, and I can't have you bothering the servants either—they are all engaged.'

'Yourn't going to turn me out o' this as you turned me out o' the park at the school treat!' said Esther, defiantly. 'I be growed big since then.' She tossed her shoulders. 'I know this, I wi'n't go. I wi'n't go till I ha' seed Miss Alice. Her and I be fast friends, and I ha' gotten sum'ut for she.'

'What is that? Why, goodness——' Jane tried to snatch a box from under Esther's arm. 'That's the Curgenven jewel-case. Esther! what right have you to that? Where did you get that?'

'Where I got 'n, and how I got 'n, is naught to you. I'm bringing it for Miss Alice.'

'Give it to me at once, I insist. That box has been lost for a twelvemonth—it was made away with. You stole it. I'll have you summoned. Give it up to me instantly.'

'I wi'n't,' said Esther, defiantly. 'Why should I? I'll give it, I reckon, to Miss Alice—her's the true Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven now. The butler chap said so. I reckon you've no more to do wi' it than he has. I'll gi'e it to the proper Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven, and none other.'

At that moment Alice, in her travelling dress, descended the stairs. In a moment she saw Esther, and came to her with both hands extended. 'My dear Esther! I am so delighted. You, too, have come to wish me happiness. That was the only thing wanting to make me quite happy. Come along with me up-stairs, and I will show you all the pretty things that kind friends have given me.'

She led Esther away out of the throng to her room.

'Now, Esther,' she said, 'sit down and tell me all about yourself. You are quite well again now?'

'Yes, I reckon I'm just as I was. And see here, Miss Alice, I've brought you all the Curgenven diamonds and pearls, and other beauties. They was lost, but I had 'em. And yet I'd clean forgot all about 'em. You know I was cruel bad wi' fever, and then I dun' know, I niver gave a thought to 'em, till I heard as you was a-goin' to be married, and then all to once they jumped into my head. I had 'em all under a floor-stone to Tolmenna. I reckon there ain't one lost. No one niver has touched 'em since I put 'em there. There, that's brave, on your weddin' day I can give you a better present than all them beautiful things the grand folk ha' given you.'

'And you wish me all happiness, dear Esther.'

''Ees, I reckon I do. It's I, too, as made it all come about. Didn't I put your hands together through the hole at Tolmenna? Well, folks as ha' done that, they're sure joined more nor any parson or registrar can make 'em. That be how Tregaskis and I is goin' to be married.'

'Esther! Tregaskis going to marry you? The constable!'

'No—I reckon it's I be going to marry Tregaskis. But he's no constable no more, soas!'

'What, has he left the force?'

'I'll just tell 'ee all about it,' said Esther, seating herself. 'Tregaskis be cruel sweet on me; he hev' took a fancy to I ever sin' I were i' fever i' his sister's and his house. I can't blame him. He ain't a bad 'un now he's seed the error o' his ways, and found liberty.'

'What do you mean, Esther?' Alice had some little acquaintance with the quaint revivalist cant that pervades all the working-classes in Cornwall, but she did not see how this exactly applied to the constable. 'Sure Mr. Tregaskis has always been a most exemplary man.'

'He's been terrible under the law, as folks say,' answered Esther. 'But I'm right glad to say now, Miss Alice, he's found liberty.'

'But, my dear Esther, I do not understand you.'

'It's easy though,' said the moor-girl. 'When Tregaskis told the sergeant he were going to be married to I, then they kicked up such a bobbery. They said it would bring disgrace on the force, and they—that's the sergeant and the superintendent—wouldn't have it, and they'd have Tregaskis moved off somewhere to the hinder end o' Cornwall. Well, Tregaskis wouldn't stan' this, and so it come about that it was he must go out o' the force, or do without I; and nat'rally he couldn't do that, so he's no more a perleceman, and under the law. And he says he's cruel glad, and feels lighter and easier already; it's like a burden lifted off his heart. He had to be always on duty, and walkin' the rounds night and day, meeting other perlece, and all for no good at all. And then he was that tight squedged up i' his uniform, and his poor head boxed up i' a sort of helmet. It were the bondage of Egypt. But he's found liberty now, and is out o' it all.'

'But what is Tregaskis going to do?'

'Nothing, that's just it,' answered Esther, cheerily. 'Gran'fer, and he, and I be a-goin' to build up Tolmenna once more. It seems old Lawyer Physic hadn't no proper title to the land, or sum'ut's gone wrong, and I reckon nobody knows exactly whose it is, or p'r'aps it be gone back to the lord o' the manor. Anyhow, us is goin' to tumble the old place together again; us can do it in a couple o' days.'

'Yes, that is all very well; but for a livelihood?'

'Us don't want a terrible deal on the moor—no more nor does long cripples' (snakes), 'or horniwinks' (peewits). 'But it'll make gran'mother easy i' her mind; you know her couldn't die i' peace wi'out giving up her secret to somebody, and her'll give it to Tregaskis, and I reckon he'll pick up a shilling or so in charmin' warts, and tellin' fortunes, and strikin' king's evil, and blessin' wounds, and staunchin' blood and so.'

'But, Esther, this is a wonderful change in Mr. Tregaskis—a policeman to become a white-witch.'

''Ees, I reckon it be,' said Esther, in a tone of triumph. 'But he sez, sez he, wi' a crow like a cock, "Civilization be blowed." He be a changed creature—that he be, I do assure you, miss; you'd say so, if you seed him now.'

'Why, what is he about now?'

'He's a-tearin' up o' his clothes, his uniform, you know, and he's chuckin' all the buttons with the crown on 'em into Trewortha Marsh, where a twelvemonth agone he runned arter me, and tummled in, up to his chin, i' the bog water.' Esther went off into a fit of laughter. 'Bless y', Miss Alice, us be goin' to have a figgy' (plum) 'puddin' to our weddin', and us be a-goin' to bile 'n i' his helmet. The young squire said I was to tak' what sticks I liked out o' the Curgenven woods, and we'll bile our puddin' on them sticks and a few clots o' turf 'Twill be brave.'

'The carriage is at the door,' said the servant, after knocking.

'Now really, Esther, I must go. Good-bye; give me a kiss.'

'You'll come and see me and Tregaskis, won't you?' pleaded the wild girl.

'Dear Esther, yes, but only on one condition—that you are married in church. Passing the hands through the hole in the stone may satisfy you and the ex-constable, but not me. Promise me that.'

'Very well, I'll do that just to oblige you,' said Esther, resignedly, 'but it's terrible like going under the law again. I'll do it. I'll tell y' somethin' more as'll make y' laugh. Rainy days, and when us has got nothin' to do, Tregaskis and me'll knock each other about the head wi' his truncheon, just for exercise, and to amuse gran'fer and gran'mother.'

'I really must go,' said Alice, and descended the stairs, attended by Esther.

'What, you still here!' exclaimed Jane. 'I thought I had ordered you out of this house. Really, Alice, you must not encourage this girl.'

'Now you leave she alone,' said Esther, 'it's no concern of yourn. And I tell y' I'll walk wi' my young man about i' the park, and nobody shall say "Get out" now. You ar'n't nothin'. Her's Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

The carriage drove away, the slipper was thrown, rice was showered. The Archdeacon and Jane Curgenven stood in the drive looking after the carriage.

Jane uttered a little groan. 'I never, never thought *that*, or I never would have consented.'

'What, love?'

'That my child, that chit, should take precedence over me, and be Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven.'

THE END.

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